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THOUGHT AND SOCIAL STRUGGLE

A HISTORY OF DIALECTICS

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Bibliography

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Believe in the works, not in the words; words are an empty shell, but the works show you the master, Paracelsus (1988), page 101.

What, then, does a rational writer want? What can he want? Nothing but to intervene in the universal and public life, and to shape and transform it in his image. If he does not want to do that, all his speech is but an empty sound to gratify idle ears, Fichte, quoted in Hegel (1964), page 5.

..he who is not linked by a tie of kinship with the object will not acquire insight through ease of apprehension or a good memory; for basically he does not accept the object, as its nature is foreign to him, Plato, Letter 7, 344a, quoted in Kolakowski (1978), page 16.

Introduction

What is the Dialectic?

A retailer claims that Cleckheaton is becoming a "shoplifters' paradise" because of a lack of police officers patrolling the town centre on foot...Inspector Paul Linden, of Cleckheaton police station, told the meeting he did not have the resources to have community constables patrolling the streets as often as the traders wanted. But he said police were tackling the shoplifting problem by arresting people for drugs offences - as many of them stole from the shops to feed their habits. Insp. Linden said closed circuit television cameras in the town centre, as in neighbouring towns such as Dewsbury, were the best solution to the problem. This report, from the Telegraph and Argus (10th July 1998), describes an exchange of views at Spensborough Chamber of Trade and Commerce. Such reports are a commonplace in the local and national press around the world, but reveal in microcosm the contradictions of contemporary free-market social relations. Whilst the, largely positivistic, methods of economics, sociology and social psychology can partially explain these events, a dialectical approach seeks to go further and penetrate beyond the immediate 'facts' of the outer and link them to the social relationships of the inner.

Relatively few people regularly use the term *dialectics*, or know much about its meaning and genesis. One way of beginning a study of the subject is to refer to the well known poem by T.S.Eliot (1963) entitled *Burnt Norton*, since it contains a number of dialectical formulations. Eliot had studied philosophy at Harvard University and wrote, but did not submit, a doctoral thesis on the work of the British philosopher F.H.Bradley. According to Kenner (1962) Bradley's dialectical philosophy continued to exert a strong influence on Eliot's poetry. The idea that the world is perpetually in a state of *change* was an important theme in Bradley's text *Appearance and Reality*: "For whether there is progress or not, at all events there is change", quoted on page 41 of Kenner. Bradley rejected the idea of a split between the observing human subject and the object of cognition, writing instead of the natural and social world as a *totality* which "is experienced all together as a coexisting mass, not perceived as parted and joined even by relations of coexistence. It contains all relations, and distinctions", Kenner page 42. These dialectical themes were taken up by Bradley from the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers, particularly Heraclitus, and from the German philosopher Hegel. Therefore, it is

no surprise that Eliot's poem is introduced by two fragments from Heraclitus. The poem begins:

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present*

According to Kenner, these lines on time were influenced by Bradley's remark that "The character of an existence is determined by what it has been and by what it is (potentially) about to be", page 54. They draw attention to another dialectical theme paradox, or *contradiction*, particularly the idea that contradiction is the source of change and development. This idea is expressed in the following extract from Eliot's poem: *Or say that the end precedes the beginning, And the end and the beginning were always there Before the beginning and after the end. And all is always now.* Eliot's use of the term *abstraction* in the first extract is also important in dialectical thought both as a polar opposite to the term *concrete*, and in its meaning of taking parts out of a whole.

Later Eliot writes:

*The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner.
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded*

This draws attention to the relationship between the outer and the inner, which is sometimes expressed in dialectical idiom as the appearance and the essence. Eliot may be revealing a Buddhist influence in his use of the term *desire*, which in that religion is viewed negatively as the cause of suffering. However, Eliot later views desire positively as a means of linking the subject and the object: *Desire itself is movement...Between un-being and being.* Thus Eliot

suggests that desire produces purposeful activity, or *praxis*, in order to satisfy need and replace nothing with something

These quotations set the pattern for the remainder of this text; dialectical thinkers will normally be quoted directly, rather than merely paraphrased, and the commentary will ground the quotations historically. Alternative approaches to dialectics, for example that deployed in Lenin (1961) consisting in part of lists of dialectical formulae, is rejected. Similarly the idea of writing a textbook on dialectics which reduces the method to a number of rules, as in books on formal logic, is considered inappropriate since it reduces specific content to empty form. The method chosen presents a socio-economic *history* of dialectics, from earliest hunter-gatherer society to the present day. In this way the form and content of the dialectic is shown to be inseparable from social being in general, and specific social struggles in particular. The need for a comprehensive history of dialectics was bolstered by the fact that there is no such history available in English, nor, to my knowledge, in any other language.

A number of texts contain short introductions to the dialectic, and the following from Martin Nicolaus' foreword to Marx (1973) is typical:

Dialectics has a very long history. (The term comes from the Greek 'dia', meaning split in two, opposed, clashing; and 'logos', reason; hence 'to reason by splitting in two')...the early Greek philosophers...seeing, for example, an arrow in flight or a bird winging across a river...would reason in this way: in its motion, the thing is changed from being here to being there. Since 'here' and 'there' exclude each other, they reasoned that motion is the transformation of one state of things into the opposite state; or, since the motion includes both the beginning and its opposite the end, that motion is the unity of these opposites; or, in sum, that motion is contradiction. Since there were other philosophers who asserted that everything is motion, it is easy to see why dialectics could become an important tendency within philosophy from very early on, pages 27-8. However, Nicolaus, in common with most of the radical intelligentsia, suggests that the Greeks first employed the dialectical method, when in fact, as we shall discover, the mode of thinking long predates Heraclitus and Zeno.

One text which has attempted a summary history of dialectics is Kolakowski (1978), particularly the first chapter entitled *The Origins of the Dialectic*. However, this author

similarly begins his study with the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and then arbitrarily selects Plotinus, Augustine, Eriugena as a prelude to Renaissance esoteric and mystical thought, which prepares the ground for the German idealists. Kolakowski fails to locate these writers historically and therefore omits to mention how changes in the form and content of the dialectic are connected to social being. For example, Kolakowski is silent on the question of why the concept of the Absolute, or the One, from its content as God was later inverted to become nature, and was subsequently inverted to refer to humanity.

If we consider further the themes of Eliot's poem, we see that the natural and social world are both interconnected and constantly changing, and that our lives contain contradictions. However, it is also the case that normally our world appears to be reasonably stable and predictable, and life's contradictions are either resolved or suppressed. Even thinkers supporting the social status quo, be this slavery, feudalism or contemporary capitalism, who tend to stress the stability and harmony of society, accept that change and contradiction can never be totally suppressed. Contemporary media-dominated society provides another example in a recent perfume advertisement which features a product called *Contradiction*. The advert draws attention to, and exploits, the paradoxical desires and relationships of its potential customers. Even mainstream theologians, including the Pope, management gurus, economists and other ideologues speak of "paradoxes" in society, and the term 'The Three Antinomies of Greed' is used by the economist Brockway (1995). Financial journalists give examples of contradictions, such as the fact that a high interest rate favours importers because it lowers the prices they have to pay, but simultaneously hurts exporters by pricing them out of foreign markets. It is similarly a commonplace to hear reports that farmers are being paid not to grow food in a world where millions of people face starvation. Whilst stable weather conditions apply most of the time, and are a prerequisite in providing for our subsistence needs, adverse weather conditions all too often threaten our ability to subsist. To the extent that we are *conscious* of contradiction, change and the existence of totalising relationships in our natural and social world, we are thinking dialectically.

In the broadsheet press, as in most sections of the academic community, dialectics is usually associated with a few formulae, such as the negation of the negation, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, or the relation between base and superstructure. Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature* (1940) was in large measure responsible for reducing dialectics to the mechanical application of formulae. As we see in Chapter Nine, Engels' method became the official logic of Communist Parties throughout the

world: Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao used what came to be known as dialectical materialism, or Diamat, as a kind of *Realpolitik*, or means of defending the privileges of their class, the radical intelligentsia. Recently many philosophers have used the "collapse of Communism" as evidence for the view that *all* dialectical thought takes this form, and therefore it should be abandoned. This text takes the opposite view, seeing the demise of *dialectical materialism* as an opportunity for both an examination of the history of dialectical thought and an assessment of its usefulness in understanding the complexities of late 20th century capitalism.

The text concentrates on the dialectical explanation of society, rejecting an *immanent* dialectic of nature and similar *a priori* methods. However, a strong case can be made for the application of a dialectical method of *presentation* to some natural phenomena, since what was implicitly dialectical thought was used by Newton as a means of presenting his empirically derived discoveries. An implicit dialectic is used routinely in the natural sciences, particularly in presenting the results of sub-atomic experiments. Dialectics is the origin of both fuzzy logic and complexity theory, currently used in a range of disciplines, and it is no exaggeration to say that a growing minority of social scientists, especially in economics and management theory, are becoming aware of the limits imposed on them by the exclusive use of static, or formal, logic or related types of "common sense". The kind of abstract thought used in formal logic, and mathematics, is more or less adequate when dealing with those aspects of reality which are relatively static. However, to the extent that material reality is changing, interconnected and contradictory, it presents problems which are more likely to be articulated, if not solved, by the use of dialectics.

An important theme in the text is the rejection of the Leninist preoccupation with "militant materialism", which roots out idealism wherever it manifests itself. The philosophy of materialism, based on the concept of matter taken from 19th century physics, is rejected and replaced by a totalising dialectic of life and thought. The text uses the idioms of the Hegelian dialectic, with its roots in tribal magic, religion, myth, mysticism, alchemy and much else that is dismissed by Leninists as "idealism".

The thesis of the first chapter is that dialectical thought, along with the ability to think deductively and inductively, began with earliest hunter-gatherer people, who, because they were engaged in a struggle for existence, were aware that their needs could only be satisfied by the interpenetration of theory and practice, intellectual and manual labour. No society could

survive without tools and the ability to theorise the cause and effect relationships embodied in them. The relationship between symbolic theory and material practice is apparent in the art and culture of earliest society, as is demonstrated by the Japanese goddess Kwannon, “who holds a different object in each of her hundred hands” page 33 of Barnes (1965). The idea of *forces* was a key concept in earliest society; these can be either negative or positive, either destructive or essential for life, as demonstrated with example of the multiplicity of processes unleashed by fire, which hunter gatherers were able to create from friction or other sources.

The survival of early agriculturalists depended on the theorisation of weather patterns and the seasons, and, as noted in Chapter Two, the ancient Egyptians developed a sophisticated 365 day calendar in the fifth millenium B.C.. It is clear from their records that they theorised both the regularity and the apparent arbitrariness of the movements of the planets and stars. The idioms, many of which are highly dialectical, contained in the religion, myths, magic and art of earliest society are attempts to theorise their natural and social world. A lack of technical knowledge led to explanations of cause and effect relationships in a totalising world of forces and spirits which connected, and often metamorphosed, gods, humans and animals. As Eliot’s poem suggests, earliest deductive, inductive and dialectical thought is part of a theoretical and practical continuum with the past, present and future. As Barnes explains:

The mind stretches far beyond the limited experiences of the individual. It contains within itself all the past and the future. It has grown up in the race, step by step, and has passed through stages as different from its present form as we can possibly conceive. It is so vastly complex that it is never twice alike in the same individual, nor are ever two minds the same. It is the product of millions of years of struggle, page 40.

The mediation between thought and practice is language, which “transforms the process of social tradition; precept accelerates education...human experience can be pooled...language makes tradition rational”, Childe (1964), pages 18-19. Reasoning, in particular the process of abstraction, allowed early society to eliminate irrelevant detail and avoid unnecessary trial and error by going through practical processes in their heads using symbols and images of the actions involved. However, the theory developed from reasoning takes on a degree of independence from practical life, thus allowing society to escape its “bondage to the concrete”. Spiritual ideas such as cause, freedom, beauty, the One and immortality, which refer to nothing having sensual being, became increasingly important. These conceptions

interrelate with everyday things in explaining, controlling and transforming nature on the one hand and holding society together and lubricating its workings on the other. As a result of division of labour, certain tribal members came to monopolise the abstract thought and developed occult science in opposition to the manual labour of the mass of the tribe; so began class society.

The intellectual élite developed various occult systems of thought, including natural magic or “the deepest knowledge of the secrets of nature”, quoted in Nataf (1994) page 55, and hermetic time, which is contrasted with clock time and lived time. Eastern Martial Arts involved the “dialectical argument between full and empty”, page 57, balance and imbalance, and the Tarot, with its links to the Kabbalah, was based not on rigid concepts but on combinations of “affirmation and negation, then synthesis and solution...meaning and chance”, page 91. The occult is typically defined as “not understood or able to be understood by the mind, beyond the range of ordinary knowledge”, Nataf page 1. Occult dialectics influenced psychoanalysis which provided much insight into our understanding of concepts like mind, consciousness and the self, all of which, despite Leninist charges of “idealism”, are crucial to our comprehension of the relationship between the individual and society. The Great Monad of occult mathematics is simultaneously unity and nothingness, the infinity of the circle; it generates the dyad, the triad and all numbers, and metaphorically squares the circle. An important aid in gaining knowledge of invisible forces is analogy with the visible, or using the known to learn more about the unknown. Anticipating the Hegelian dialectical interpretation of history, initiation into a Mystery cult was a quest whose object was not the destination but knowledge acquired on the journey itself. Also anticipating classical political economy, the Trade-Guilds and Masonic Lodges spoke of the mysterious power of human labour, or *praxis*, in their struggles with the feudal lords, and later the factory owners. The occult pentagram represents the link between the coincidence of microcosm and macrocosm, the part which contains all aspects of the whole, the link between earth and heaven, practice and theory. This occult dialectical theme, captured in the Hermetic principle “all that is below is like all that is above”, Nataf page 83, provides an early articulation of the title of this text: thought and social struggle. Thus, for example, we can link the replacement of goddesses of fertility by abstract male gods to the move from hunter-gatherer or early matriarchal agricultural modes of production to patriarchal slave-based or feudal societies.

Dialectical thought survived in a number of esoteric cults and lodges in 18th century France, most of which supported the Revolution, and were subsequently involved in the Paris Commune and the First International. A number of French socialists, notably Proudhon and Fourier, were influenced by the occult in their use of dialectics. Fourier used his Theory of Attraction or human passion, based on myth and alchemic symbolism, as a utopian solution to the contradictions of capitalist society. Jollivet-Castelot was a late 19th century French alchemist who attempted a synthesis with materialism and formed a society called the *Non-Materialist Communist Union*. He asserted that alchemy, a source for Hegel's dialectic, "must treat matter as living, respect it therefore and manipulate it in the awareness of its intellectual potential. He must see in it a part of Being, multiplied, fragmented, divided and suffering, but tending through endless evolution towards reconstitution in the Unity of Substance", quoted on page 147 of Nataf.

As 18th century political economy struggled to theorise the complexities of the emerging capitalist mode of production, its leading exponents readily acknowledged the existence of "paradoxes". These included Mandeville's "private vices and public benefits" and Adam Smith's water-diamonds paradox. These acted as paradigms for the neo-classical "economic problem" and the Keynesian "paradox of thrift", which in turn inspired the articulation of a number of paradoxes in late 20th century capitalism by contemporary writers such as Charles Handy in his *Empty Raincoat* (1994) and Paul Ormerod in *The Death of Economics* (1994). That these "paradoxes" remain today is evident from the fact that the Monetary Policy Committee is on the one hand being advised by finance capital not to reduce interest rates so as to avoid inflationary pressures. On the other hand it is being advised by exporting manufacturers to reduce interest rates so as to lower the high value of the pound which is damaging their sales abroad.

The final chapters concern the degradation of the dialectic by Bolshevik intellectuals and its subsequent regeneration in the *critique* of Western Marxism, and the conclusion contains two examples of critique applied to contemporary debates. The examples of worker-dialecticians, such as Joseph Dietzgen and Fred Casey, show that the dialectic need not be the occult property of the radical intelligentsia, but can be democratised and taken up by the masses.

It only remains to point out that concerns with space have prevented consideration of a number of writers who have made contributions to dialectical thought, such as Bhaskar, Adorno and Benjamin. Similar reasons have meant that the text does not consider well known criticisms of dialectical thought, in particular those by Popper, Della Volpe, Althusser and Elster.

Chapter One

Dialectics and Earliest Society

Dialectical reasoning is both ancient and ubiquitous, Murphy (1976), page 85.

1. There exists a yawning abyss, bordered on one side by a realm of mist and cold, on the other by a region of fire.

2. A giant is brought into being through the melting of the congealing vapour in the place of cold by a spark of fire from the region of Muspelheim.

3. This becomes the progenitor of a race of giants.

A Scandinavian creation myth recorded in Spence (1994), pages 193-4, which illustrates the dialectical theme of the interpenetration of opposites.

As I die and, dying, live, so shall ye die and, dying, live. A Hottentot message spoken by a hare sent by the moon, quoted in Werner (1995), page 33.

This immortality of the dead is a fantastic reality. The dead really live on socially in the inherited culture of society, but to the primitive they live fantastically, clothed in the affective and concrete images of his dreams in another ghostly world, Caudwell (1971), page 32, giving an insight into the totalising metaphysics of 'primitive' peoples.

Problems involved in the study of the thought of earliest society

One cannot simply posit another people's judgments of 'reality' a priori, by means of common sense or common humanity, without taking the trouble of an ethnographic investigation, Sahlins (1995) page 163.

Archaeology is of only limited help: without recourse to the laboratory of mankind, primitive thoughts can only be inferred hazily, if at all, from the detritus of vanished material cultures which digs unearth from time to time, Fernández-Armesto (1998) page 16.

There are a number of problems associated with the study of the modes of thought of earliest society. As there is so little direct evidence of this thought, apart from the spoken literature of its few survivors, we must rely on the evidence of traders, travellers and missionaries as well as the academic research produced by anthropologists, economists, psychologists, ethnologists and others. For reasons to be explained much of this evidence is highly suspect, therefore it has to be examined critically, and supplemented by a totalising anthropology. As Carr (1964) pointed out, we need to be aware of the vantage point of the recorder of each piece of historical evidence. Evidence will always be mediated by the life and times of the recorder, and will implicitly relate to his or her attitudes to the past, present and future. Murphy (1972), in his useful though limited text, argued that functionalist anthropology, for example, developed during a period of relative stability in western capitalist society, and by and large emphasised stability and order in earlier societies. In contrast the period after 1968, with its greater political and economic uncertainty, led to the adoption of anthropological and sociological models which corresponded rather more to the new contemporary circumstances.

This chapter will begin with the palaeolithic mode of production, which can be defined as small groups of hunter-gatherers, obtaining their subsistence with the aid of unpolished chipped stone tools. However, as an example of the problem identified in the previous paragraph, neo-classical economists, as Sahlins (1974) points out, wrongly claim that these hunter gatherers spent most of their time at work in order to fend off impending starvation. This neo-classical view is based upon the assumed existence of a universal 'economic problem', the 'problem' being the finite level of the planet's natural resources on the one hand and the infinity of human wants on the other. To bolster this claim of a universal contradiction at the core of human existence, neo-classicals usually resort to pseudo-mathematical models of asocial individuals, reminiscent of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, optimising their welfare subject to 'scarce resources'. Francis Fukuyama's (1992) book presents the same view from a philosophical perspective, but features an ill-informed account of earliest society, based on the views of Hobbes, Locke and, surprisingly, Hegel. Fukuyama sees human history as a process involving linear progress from an initial 'primitive society' followed by steady development towards 'individual self-consciousness'. The historical process ends in the triumph of capitalism, or liberal democracy, which implicitly provides the best possible solution to the 'economic problem', and represents 'the end of history'. As this text develops it will become clear that the neo-classical view of earliest

society and its place in history is, despite its one-sided truths about resources and human wants, incorrect and represents a crude rationalisation of history from the vantage point of the ideological needs of contemporary capitalism.

Most economics textbook writers, indirectly influenced by the work of early anthropologists such as Frazer (1993), Tylor (1871), Read (1995) and Lang (1995), compound their historical limitations by implicitly adopting an Aryan colonialist world view. As Bernal (1991) shows, this view developed from the 19th century romantic, historical progress and racist movements. It was used to justify the appalling practices of the colonial era by claiming that only white Europeans were civilised and capable of rational thought. According to this view, philosophy, along with mathematics, science, democracy and culture in general, only began with the ancient Greeks, who were alleged to be an Aryan people. Lang (1995) is typical when he speaks of “savages”, “lower races” and “black fellows”. Even those researchers who learned the languages of tribes by and large failed to use them to develop an awareness of the imperatives of both their own society and the one under study. As a result most failed to understand the complexity of the life and thought of the tribes which they studied.

Contemporary neo-classical economists have dropped the more overt racist and colonialist language, but continue to present a Hollywood style image of devil-worshipping grunting savages, living in grinding poverty. This image continues despite much anthropological evidence to the effect that mathematical principles, large vocabularies, subtle grammars, abstract terms, advanced art and the use of perspective, all developed in some early societies. These observations demonstrate the need to be critical in interpreting the evidence on life and thought in earliest society, not only where the sources contain examples of colonial and racist stereo-typing, but also where they seem at first sight more enlightened.

Few writers speak of the social class of the recorder of anthropological and other evidence on earliest thought. As most evidence is collected by members of the middle class intelligentsia, it is necessary to consider the world view of this class and consider how this is likely to affect its thinking on earliest society. It is currently fashionable amongst the radical intelligentsia to promote what remains of earliest society in the name of identity politics. However, such a perspective normally amounts to little more than promoting conspicuous consumption in the form of package holidays in exotic locations or writing articles in praise of, for example, Anita

Roddick's antics in the Brazilian rainforest. The complex relationship between the class which lives from its intellectual labour and other classes is a theme which will be developed throughout this text.

Research on the palaeolithic age in particular presents difficulties because, although hunting and gathering accounts for the vast bulk of human history, it is a mode of production which has now almost completely disappeared. The hunters and gatherers that survive have largely been forced onto marginal areas such as the Australian interior and the Arctic tundra. The research suggests that these are "displaced persons" compared to those hunters and gatherers who once lived in areas which abounded in food. This has to be taken into account in speculations based on backward extrapolations as to the life and thought of these societies. Clearly the fact that field work is being done means that a tribe is likely to react to being observed thereby negating the worth of the evidence, as even the colonialist Read (1995) pointed out. It is difficult to know how representative a tribe's current thought is of that going back thousands of years, even where the evidence suggests little contact with other tribes. There is a contradiction here, in that it might be expected that tribes which survive are likely to be the most developed in their thinking, yet these are going to be the tribes which have had most contact with other peoples. However, the more contact the greater the likelihood that the members of the tribe will become assimilated into other modes of production or, if the contact has been with 19th century European colonisers, eliminated by genocide or starvation.

Laurens van der Post (1975) records the genocide of the remaining !Kung (the ! is used to indicate the indigenous clicking sound), or 'Bushmen' to use his Boer term, who are mentioned by the ancient Egyptians and may be the oldest people on earth. Today these people are almost universally treated with contempt, even some anthropologists and other academics displaying ignorance of their lives and thought, claims Post. Nonetheless, in their depleted and debased current state, these people retain a high level of cultural attainment in their art, music and dancing. Post records a pantomime performed by the !Kung which takes the form of a war caused by male tribal jealousy over a woman, and, unlike the bloodletting of Homer, it is clearly a pacifist version of this oldest of themes. He also records a totalising rounders-like game played by !Kung women which integrates singing, dancing and mime into a theme of knowledge about, and love for, the animals in their lives. These examples make it

highly likely, according to Post, that these earliest of people long ago developed a mode of thinking which is both advanced and totalising.

Murphy (1972) gives the example of research done on North American Indians, where the total destruction of their mode of production, not to mention genocide practised against some tribes, means that their present life of “desultory farming, wage labour, or just sitting”, page 23, is hardly likely to produce much evidence on the practice and thought of Indian tribes of thousands of years ago. “The American students turned to this surviving source, wringing out the last bit of memory from the oldest Indians they could find before even this information was completely lost...How indeed does one reconcile the proud warrior of the Plains with the drunken Indian lying in a pool of his own vomit in a backstreet gutter in Billings, Montana?”, page 24. However, it is important not to make the opposite error, as many anthropologists do, of imagining a tribe’s *static* golden age, before its fall from grace. As Murphy points out, all societies are in a constant state of flux, though the rate of change may be very slow, or uneven, at times. He makes the further point that anthropologists tend to do field work in areas which are either present or former colonies, or are under their respective governments’ sphere of influence, although he fails to speculate on how this and related influences may affect the content of their work:

A major theme in dialectical thought is the concept of the *whole* or *totality*. The whole was often referred to as *the one*, or God, by thinkers in earliest society, and was considered in terms of its relationship with its component parts, or *the many*. This dialectical way of thinking has important implications for the study of earliest thought. Each piece of authenticated evidence resulting from field work and elsewhere must be interpreted as part of the totality of the evidence, and seen as true only within its limits. Because this truth is limited, or *one-sided* to use Hegel’s term, it must be recognised and *negated*, or overcome. Since Hegel regarded the true as *the whole*, his method contrasted sharply with that of positivist anthropologists. The latter adopt a fixed dualist opposition of true or false with regard to the evidence, or “social facts” to use Durkheim’s phrase, on the thought of earliest society. Positivism further assumes that there is a fixed duality between the anthropological subject who passively records “the facts” of a world of isolated objects. This approach relies on the correspondence theory of truth, where each of the subject’s thoughts, expressed in discrete words and sentences, corresponds on a one to one basis with the discrete objects of

experience, rather like a mirror reflection. The dialectical method, in sharp contrast to positivism, insists that reality is composed not of self-subsisting things or facts, but of relationships or *a process of becoming*.

Leninist philosophy, which we examine in chapter nine, is similar to much anthropological methodology, particularly the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, examined later in this chapter, in positing fixed dualist distinctions in its analysis of earliest society. Typical of the methodology of Leninism is the fixed opposition between the material base and the ideological superstructure, which is based on a few isolated remarks made by Marx. The most famous of these remarks is contained in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, see Marx (1970): “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness...The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure”, page 20-21. Such a reductive approach is inadequate, and at odds with other remarks made by Marx; firstly in so far as it fails to recognise that these base and superstructure polarities are abstractions from the integrated totality of society, and secondly in its further claim that developments in the base cause developments in the superstructure but never the other way round. This example of reductive thought is cited in order to show why a methodology based on fixed polarities must be rejected in the study of earliest society.

The Marxist anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, in *Stone Age Economics*, see Sahlins (1974), implicitly rejects this linear cause and effect relationship, suggesting instead a more complex totalising two-way relationship. The economy, culture and all other aspects of the life and thought of earliest society, like that of all societies, interpenetrate in the process of becoming, “new social forms are struggling to emerge”, to quote Murphy, page 83. A range of cultural factors, such as attitudes to age, gender, religion and magic, profoundly affect the division of labour and when, where and how labour is performed. In order to understand life and thought in these early, and indeed all, societies, it is necessary to adopt methods which stress the complex tensions which create the internal dynamic of their totality. As even the functionalist anthropologist Evans-Pritchard explains of the Nuer: “One cannot treat Nuer economic relations by themselves, for they always form part of direct social relations of a general kind ...there is always between them a general social relationship of one kind or another, and their

economic relations, if such they may be called, must conform to this general pattern of behaviour”, quoted in Sahlins page 186.

Sahlins on the genesis of reified thinking

Each people knows their own kind of happiness: the culture that is the legacy of their ancestral tradition, transmitted in the distinctive concepts of their language, and adapted to their specific life conditions...They come to it not simply as cognitions but as values. To speak of reasoning correctly on objective properties known through unmediated sensory perceptions would be epistemologically out of the question...commonsense bourgeois realism, when taken as a historiographic conceit, is a kind of symbolic violence done to other times and other customs. I want to suggest that one cannot do good history, not even contemporary history, without regard for ideas, actions, and ontologies that are not and never were our own. Different cultures, different rationalities, Sahlins (1995) pages 12 and 14.

A recent text by Sahlins (1995) traces the historical process which begins with the totalising anthropocentric cosmology of earliest society and ends with "the bourgeois solipsism of a individual in need of the object, who accordingly comes to know the world by an adaptive process and as the empirical values of bodily self-satisfaction", page 154. He says that earliest thinkers mediated their "classifications of birds, animals, plants and the rest of nature according to local distinctions of groups and genders, habitats and directions, times and places, modes of production and reproduction, categories of kinship, and concepts of spirit...the human values of their objective characteristics", page 159. Sahlins quotes Marx to emphasise his anthropocentric view: "Nature taken abstractly, for itself - nature fixed in isolation from man - is *nothing* for man", page 162.

However, says Sahlins, this reified abstract nature is precisely the approach adopted by the Hebrew-Christian monotheistic tradition, in which a transcendent God replaces the anthropocentric spirits immanent in nature. In contradistinction to the divine humanism of earliest society "Like the Hebrew people before them, Christians viewed the 'deification of nature' as the essence of a paganism from which they sought to distinguish themselves", page 164. Thus began both the materiality of nature, devoid of spirit, and the debasement of humanity: the greater is God, the more insignificant are men and women. From the monotheistic original sin emerged the bourgeois concept of economic man (sic) locked into a lifelong quest to satisfy his ever expanding needs in a

world of scarcity. Utilitarian positivist logic, and the empirical world of things, replaced magic and myth based on analogy, similitude, microcosm and the totalising dialectic of the hunter-gatherer. There was an end to the totality, continuity and interpenetration between organic and inorganic nature, between humanity and divinity; each was classified into its own self-subsistent category of being.

Joseph Campbell's *Masks of God*

..mythology is a rendition of forms through which the formless Form of forms can be known. An inferior object is presented as the representation, or habitation, of a superior, Campbell (1991), in Platonic mode, page 55.

Volume One of Campbell's four volume work (1991) contains a mass of useful material. He begins in the foreword with the claim that "It is...circa 5500-4500 B.C.- that those well-known, unlikelike, conventionalized naked-goddess figurines appear that have been generally associated with the earliest village arts. A trend from naturalism to abstraction, from visual to conceptual thought, would seem thus to be indicated", page vii. He implies that myth acts to encourage change, a form of proto-critique: "mythology is no toy for children, Nor is it a matter of archaic, merely scholarly concern, of no moment to modern men of action. For its symbols (whether in the tangible form of images or in the abstract form of ideas) touch and release the deepest centres of motivation, moving literate and illiterate alike, moving mobs, moving civilizations", page 12. He continues: "the festival of the lived myth abrogates all the laws of time, letting the dead swim back to life...the gods and demons are not conceived in the way of hard and fast, positive realities. A god can be simultaneously in two or more places - like a melody, or like the form of a traditional mask...there has been a shift of view from the logic of the normal secular sphere, where things are understood to be distinct from one another, to a theatrical or play sphere, where they are accepted for what they are *experienced* as being and the logic is that of 'make believe' - 'as if'", pages 21-2.

He notes that the division between gods, animals, nature and humans is ill-defined, so that there must be an exclusion of "the advocates of Aristotelean logic, for whom A can never be B; for whom the actor is never to be lost in the part; for whom the mask, the image, the consecrated host, tree, or animal cannot become God, but only a reference...one should be overtaken...spellbound, set apart from one's logic of self-possession and overpowered by the force of a logic of

'indissociation' - wherein A is B, and C is also B", page 25. Campbell's emphasis on 'play' anticipates the view of the Situationists, who we consider in chapter ten. He says that we should be "undaunted by the banal actualities of life's meagre possibilities, the spontaneous impulse of the spirit to identify itself with something other than itself for the sheer delight of play, transubstantiates the world - in which, actually, after all, things are not quite as real or permanent, terrible, important, or logical as they seem", page 29.

Campbell quotes an anthropologist who reported on the dialectical views of a Shaman, Najagneq, who said the spirit Sila upheld the universe, the weather, "in fact all life on earth - so mighty that his speech to man comes not through ordinary words, but through storms, snowfall, rain showers, the tempests of the sea, through all the forces that man fears, or through sunshine, calm seas of small, innocent, playing children who understand nothing. When times are good, Sila has nothing to say to mankind. He has disappeared into his infinite nothingness...he is with us and infinitely far away at the same time", page 53. The idea of nothingness was, as we shall see, to become important in the development of dialectical thought.

In his final chapter Campbell explains the antinomy that myth enables people to transcend their "local, historical conditions", yet "binds the individual to his family's system of historically conditioned sentiments, activities, and beliefs". It renders "an experience of the ineffable through the local and concrete, and thus paradoxically, to amplify the force and appeal of the local forms even while carrying the mind beyond them...the whole system of childhood fantasy and spontaneous belief is engaged and fused with the functioning system of the community", page 462 and 467. Campbell continues: "Though such half-mad games and plays ordered human societies were constellated in which the mutually contradictory interests of the elementary and social urges were resolved...The biological urges to enjoy and to master (with their opposites, to loathe and to fear), as well as the social urge to evaluate (as good or evil, true or false), simply drop away, and a rapture in sheer experience supervenes, in which self-loss and elevation are the same", page 469. His final paragraph ends anthropocentrically with the point that "the human mind in its polarity of the male and female modes of experience, in its passages from infancy to adulthood and old age, in its toughness and tenderness, and in its continuing dialogue with the world, is the ultimate mythogenetic zone - the creator and destroyer, the slave and yet the master, of all the gods", page 472.

Frankfort and mythopoeic thinking

Mythopoeic thought substantializes a quality and posits some of its occurrences as causes, others as effects...the gods as personifications of power among other things fulfil early man's need for causes to explain the phenomenal world, Frankfort (1946) page 17.

..mythopoeic thought fully recognizes the unity of each phenomenon which it conceives under so many different guises; the many-sidedness of its images serves to do justice to the complexity of the phenomena...The spatial concepts of the primitive are concrete orientations; they refer to localities which have an emotional colour, they may be familiar or alien, hostile or friendly. The mythopoeic conception of time is, like that of space, qualitative and concrete, not quantitative and abstract, pages 20-21 and 23.

What would a purely external truth be? It can be recognised only when we participate in it and therefore appropriate it inwardly, M. Eck, quoted in Fernández-Armesto (1998), page 9.

A text by H. and H.A. Frankfort (1946) states that in the mythopoeic thinking of earliest societies "man and nature did not stand in opposition and did not, therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition...natural phenomena were regularly conceived in terms of human experience and that human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events...for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient - and also for primitive - man it is a 'Thou'", page 4. Although the authors wrongly posit the idea that primitive 'I-Thou' thinking is unique, they acknowledge that "'Thou is not contemplated with intellectual detachment; it is experienced as life confronting life, involving every faculty of man in a reciprocal relationship", page 6. There is constant use of analogy between nature and humanity in earliest society, so, for example, "Creation is then conceived as birth", page 9. Whilst this abstracts from the differences and tensions within, and between, different societies, there can be little doubt that the empirical evidence points to the existence of a primitive totalising dialectic in which, for example, "at any moment the lock of hair or shadow may be felt by the primitive to be pregnant with the full significance of the man", page 13. The Frankforts refer to the "paradox of mythopoeic thought. Though it does not know dead matter and confronts a world animated from end to end, it is unable

to leave the scope of the concrete and renders its own concepts as realities existing per se", page 15.

Although it contains no social context, the recent text by Fernández-Armesto (1998) confirms both Sahlins' and the Frankforts' conclusions concerning the existence of an early anthropocentric dialectic. He speaks of a Njug myth involving "an encounter with a sphinx-like creature, on a journey in search of enlightenment, through a world of contrasting but interpenetrated moieties", page 11. The anthropocentric nature of early thought is again confirmed in the Winnebag Indian myth in which the "Earthmaker realized by experience that his feelings became things when the tears he shed in his loneliness became the primal waters", page 27. The author rejects the work of writers, including Piaget, who compare the thought of primitives to that of children; he shows how sophisticated, yet practical, earliest thought can be. For example, he quotes Radin who points out that the Achonawi language of Californian Indians distinguishes, in all its nouns, pronouns and verbs, between an absolute-abstract form and a relative concrete one.

Hamill's *Ethno-Logic*

..contradiction is an ethnographic fact, Hamill (1990), page 111.

Hamill (1990) makes useful points in his study of the logic of 'primitive' people. He points out that taking "Western logic as the norm for all logical systems clearly begs the question. It cannot lead to significant insights about how people think because observations that do not compare well with a norm, no matter what the norm, are marked - they may be overvalued or under valued. Thus when ethno-logicians start with Western logic as the norm, they often conclude that non-Western people are logically inferior to Westerners", page 15. Hamill suggests that Aristotelian logic be taken to be "western Europe's folk logic", and treated as equal to other folk logics rather than being treated as a paradigm for rational thought. He is critical of the work of such writers as Luria and Hallpike, who take Western logic as the norm, and reject folk logics as variously too concrete or too abstract.

Although Hamill concludes that "nothing as simple and primitive as a taxonomy can hope to capture the complexities of human semantic systems", page 37, his own work actually uses the syllogistic structure as a norm to describe the thinking of other folk logics, even though he admits it is "far too simplistic and too rigid" and does not describe how all people think.

In his final chapter Hamill discusses contradiction, which he unpromisingly defines in Aristotelian terms as threatening "to make any observed meaning system irrelevant...it has the potential to destroy the meaning on which the descriptions of reasoning patterns rest", page 109. However, he acknowledges that people do maintain contradictory views, and "in the real world contradiction does not fulfil its logical threat to dissolve all meanings and to annihilate interpretive anthropology", page 110. He goes on to give examples of tribal thinking, and practice, which display contradiction; but his discussion of the problems raised by contradictions reveals the inappropriateness of his training in formal logic to deal with the issue.

Contrasting perspectives on thought in earliest society

As we have seen, it is a commonplace amongst anthropologists to state that compared to the generally analytic, inductive and deductive thought typical of capitalist society, especially that used by the vast majority of its scientists and technicians, thought in earliest society tends to the synthetic. Today we are educated to think in terms of either-or, true or false, discrete facts or things, whereas in earliest society thought was more totalising, and at home with contradiction. One aspect of this chapter is to explain the reasons for the differences in earliest and contemporary thought by contrasting the totalities of the life and thought of hunter gathers, or the early agricultural mode of production, with that of contemporary capitalism.

Earliest palaeolithic societies lived in a way which brought them into a direct unmediated relationship with nature. The members of these societies led far more hazardous lives than do most people today; their survival depended on co-operation and conformity to a much greater degree than in other modes of production. Therefore they developed a number of means of transmitting a totalising culture corresponding to their co-operative practical needs. Ritual and ceremony were a major aspect of the lives of earliest people, and these took place at varying times of the day and night, not only in formal settings but often integrated into practical activities. As a result "activities personal and social, peaceable and war-like, economic, political and religious are so intertwined that the benefits and privileges of one provide an incentive to perform the duties required by another", Lewis (1969) page 147. In their attempts to gain greater control over a hazardous nature, members of early tribal societies anthropomorphically projected themselves into nature. Through sacrificial offerings to Gods,

artistic representation, symbolism and the summoning of spiritual powers, they attempted to bolster their lack of technical knowledge and consequent lack of practical control. Their “environment becomes, in part, at any rate, benevolent, human and social”, Lewis, page 177.

In his *Man and his Superstitions* Read (1995) reveals his vulgar colonialist and racist views on thought in earliest society. On page 22, for example, we read: “the general nature of reasoning is the same from Socrates to Sambo”. Despite his dogmatic pronouncements on “the savage’s” inability to formulate and reason according to the Aristotelian syllogism, he makes the important point that reasoning, which he rightly links to desire and expectation, is from its beginning in earliest society linked to the technique of abstraction. On page 13 he says that: “Every desire fixes attention upon beliefs favourable to it, and upon any evidence favourable to them, and diverts attention from conflicting beliefs and considerations. Thus every desire readily forms about itself a relatively isolated mass of beliefs, which resists comparison and, therefore...does not recognise the principle of contradiction. Incompatible desires may be cherished without our becoming aware of their incompatibility; or, if the fact obtrude itself upon us, we repudiate it and turn away. The more immature a mind, again, and the less knowledge it has, the less inhibition of desire is exerted by foresight of consequences that ought to awaken conflicting desires or fears; and the less compassion one has, the less is desire inhibited by its probable consequences to others: therefore, in both cases, the less check there is upon belief.”. This view, whilst expressed in dialectical terms and containing insights into abstraction and contradiction, flies in the face of the mass of evidence that earliest thought is actually more totalising than that of people in later modes of production, and for this reason *is* aware of contradictions. It is in general because of a lack of technical knowledge, rather than anything to do with the lack of understanding of the Aristotelian syllogism, as Read claims, that people in earliest society are unable to resolve their contradictions in practice and so attempt to resolve, move or sublimate them by recourse to religion, magic, myth and metaphysical thought. Read fails to see that the very survival of early tribes depends on their “compassion” and cooperation.

Whilst his work is overly biographical, rather romantic, and contains a number of colonialist assumptions, van der Post (1975) contains some useful material on the Bushmen and women, or to give them their own name !Kung. He describes them as “natural botanists” and “expert organic chemists”, page 15, and alludes to the high quality of their paintings, which imply

zoolatry, referring to their creation myth, cosmology and evolution from animal to human in their varied themes. Post mentions their various beliefs and “aboriginal superstitions” in passing, and suggests that they constitute an attempt at theorising those “aspects of reality that are beyond rational articulation”, page 160.

Post uses some dialectical formulations in his work on the !Kung, exemplified by the following quote: “Perhaps this life of ours, which begins as a quest of the child for the man, and ends as a journey by the man to rediscover the child, needs a clear image of some child-man, like the Bushman, wherein the two are firmly and lovingly joined in order that our confused hearts may stay at the centre of their brief round of departure and return”, page 11. He speaks of the totalising thought of the !Kung living at a “time when birds, beasts, plants, trees and men shared a common tongue, and the whole world, night and day, resounded like the surf of a coral sea with universal conversation”, page 20. “Today we overrate the rational values and behave as if thinking were a substitute for living. We have forgotten that thought and the intuition that feeds it only become whole if the deed grows out of it as fruit grows from the pollen on a tree. So everywhere in our civilised world there tends to be a terrible cleavage between thinking and doing”, page 61. “The whole of human development, far from having been a product of steady evolution, seemed subject to only partially explicable and almost invariably violent mutations. Entire cultures and groups of individuals appeared imprisoned for centuries in a static shape which they endured with long-suffering indifference, and then suddenly, for no demonstrable cause, became susceptible to drastic changes and wild surges of development”, page 68. “...one is free of the tyranny of the many in life only by committing oneself totally to the service of the one”, page 74.

In the proto-scientific thinking of earliest society the simultaneously physical and metaphysical concept of *force* is crucial, as Read reluctantly acknowledges. It is a clear example of abstract thought relating on the one hand to muscle exertions, water power, lightning and other natural forces; and on the other hand to spells, charms and spirits. This is advanced thinking in that it encompasses both the empirical and the non-empirical; rather like the contemporary scientific concept of the theoretical entity, which refers to forces such as magnetism and gravity. Animism is Tylor’s (1891) name for earliest society’s concept of force, and along with their equally abstract term *form*, represents the beginning of philosophy. This philosophy involves the distinction between the body and the soul, and anticipates the distinction between

appearance and essence, a major theme in dialectics. The soul, when it is disembodied, becomes a ghost, and the latter is given more or less equal status with the body by earliest thinkers. It becomes clear from Read's work, as elsewhere, that the rudiments of Egyptian, Buddhist, Hindu and Platonic thought on the soul, reincarnation, morality and so on, were already well developed in the thought of earliest society.

Many anthropologists, and others, have remarked on the dualist distinction between the overt, or exoteric, and the secret, or esoteric, in earliest thought. Van der Post (1975) notes how members of a !Kung tribe refused to discuss their cosmology with a non-initiate like himself, though they later agreed to do so. Similarly many tribes believe that some things have secret names, knowledge of which confers power over the thing on the knower of the name. Clearly in this latter example there is interpenetration between the two domains because esoteric knowledge gives power in the exoteric. As early agriculture developed esoteric knowledge became a major factor in transmitting the privileges of the magicians and priests. Read comments on anthropological evidence of early intellectual division of labour in the compartmentalisation of formerly synthesised knowledge amongst these proto-scientists. The division of labour in secret knowledge eventually led to the development of astronomy, astrology, medicine, meteorology, chemistry and alchemy in ancient and classical society. To varying degrees these became separate domains of knowledge, albeit to a lesser degree than is the case today, and were passed from father to son, or occasionally mother to daughter, in elaborate initiation ceremonies.

Read emphasises the importance of omens in earliest society. They can take many forms, such as natural events, divinations, oracles or dreams, but generally are interpreted as either warnings against misfortune or propitious signs of things to come. He explains that lack of technical knowledge tends to synthesise mere coincidence and genuine cause and effect relationships in the form of signs of impending events. These signs in turn become integrated into the totality of the life of the tribe, being explained in the form of analogy with the caprice of gods or magical powers.

George Joseph's *The Crest of the Peacock* (1990) features a chapter on earliest mathematics, and he points out that:

As far as we know there has never been a society without some form of counting or tallying (ie matching a collection of objects with some easily handled set of markers, whether it be stones, knots or inscriptions such as notches on wood or bone). If we define mathematics as any activity that arises out of, or directly generates, concepts relating to numbers or spatial configurations together with some form of logic, we can then legitimately include in our study proto-mathematics, which existed when no written records were available, page 23.

Despite analytical limitations, Joseph explains that many records of counting in earliest society survive and in particular mentions the famous Ishango bone from East Africa. It contains a large number of notches which involve tallies of sixty, the use of a base 10 number system, knowledge of duplication and prime numbers. The precise purpose of the bone is a matter of speculation, though it is thought to be many thousands of years old and probably influenced the Egyptian number system, although it may involve the *simultaneous* use of a number of different systems. Similarly the Yoruba from Nigeria had a base 20 number system that relied heavily on subtraction, which may be of very early origin. However, despite his useful discussion concerning the African, or 'Ethiopian', origin of Egyptian mathematics, because he lacks a knowledge of 'primitive' dialectics, Joseph fails to point out the tension between form and content which mathematics engenders, a tension which may have been noted even by some of its earliest practitioners. Similarly, though he discusses the links between earliest mathematics and astronomy, Joseph fails to realise the part that proto-mathematics played in the totality of earliest society, in particular the esoteric magical properties of number. As we shall see, these properties were developed further in Egyptian and Greek mathematics, notably in the Pythagorean school.

We have already noted that myth is an important component of the thinking of earliest society. Lang's (1995) work is full of examples of mythical thought, a mode of thought which was passed on to the ancient world, and which remains important today. On page 43 of volume one Lang quotes an anthropologist describing an Australian aborigine myth from the Lake Tyers region: "at one time there was no water anywhere on the face of the earth. All the waters were contained in the body of a huge frog, and men and women could get none of them. A council was held, and...it was agreed that the frog should be made to laugh, when the waters would run out of his mouth, and there would be plenty in all parts...At last the eel danced on the tip of his tail, and the gravity of the prodigious Batrachian gave way. He

laughed till he literally split his sides, and the imprisoned waters came with a rush". As we shall see, Horton has shown that this is proto-scientific totalising thought in that it uses an idiom, though one alien to contemporary science, in order to explain a natural event.

Commenting on "savage thought", Lang, despite his colonial world view, makes it clear that we are seeing the beginning of science and idealist philosophy. He says of "the savage":

...all things, animate or inanimate, human, animal, vegetable, or inorganic, seem on the same level of life, passion and reason...He regards himself as literally akin to animals and plants and heavenly bodies; he attributes sex and procreative powers even to stones and rocks, and he assigns human speech and human feelings to sun and moon and stars and wind, no less than to beasts, birds and fishes...By virtue of the close connection already spoken of between man the animals, the souls of the dead are not rarely supposed to migrate into the bodies of beasts, or to revert to the condition of that species of creatures with which each tribe supposes itself to be related by ties of kinship or friendship...the souls of the dead are spoken of, at other times, as if they inhabited a spiritual world, sometimes a paradise of flowers, sometimes a gloomy place, which mortal men may visit, but whence no one can escape who has tasted of the food of the ghosts ...From this opinion comes the myth that man is naturally not subject to death: that death was somehow introduced into the world by a mistake or a misdeed...The savage, like the civilised man, is curious. The first faint impulses of the scientific spirit are at work in his brain; he is anxious to give himself an account of the world in which he finds himself...the savage has a story for answer to almost every question that he can ask himself. These stories are in a sense scientific, because they attempt a solution of the riddles of the world...The changes of the heavenly bodies, the processes of day and night, the existence of the stars, the invention of the arts, the origin of the world (as far as known to the savage), of the tribe, of the various animals and plants, the origin of death itself, the origin of the perplexing traditional tribal customs, are all accounted for in stories, pages 49-52.

The totalising proto-scientific aspects of earliest thought are clear in what Lang calls: *a philosophy which takes resemblance, or contiguity in space, or nearness in time as a sufficient reason for predicating the relations of cause and effect...(they) often amaze us by their wealth of abstract ideas. Coincidence elsewhere stands for cause...like affects like...you can injure a man, for example, by injuring his effigy...The part suggests the whole. A lock of*

a man's hair was part of the man; to destroy the hair is to destroy its former owner. Again, whatever event follows another in time suggests it, and may have been caused by it, Lang Page 94-96.

These examples given by Lang make it quite clear that much cosmogonic myth is an idiom for proto-science. The descriptions of chaos, "the beginning", matter in potential, being and becoming, anticipate later Egyptian, Indian, Greek and other dialectical thought. Earliest thinkers had their versions of the later Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel myths, along with stories of the flood and other catastrophes. However, Lang shows his distaste for contradiction when he points out that the creation myths of some tribes are contradictory in that they contain elements of ready made humans on the one hand and gradual evolutionary processes on the other. Similarly he notes that the morality myths are often highly developed in their philosophical form, yet savage in their content. Lang is apparently unable to see evidence of similar contradictions in contemporary thought.

At the end of volume one of his book Lang discusses the contradictions in the communistic, or "unselfish", ethic of hunter gatherers: "They support, with never a murmur, widows, orphans and old men, yet they kill hopeless or troublesome invalids, and their whole conduct to Europeans was the reverse of their domestic behaviour", page 338. However, he claims that this communistic structure, and its corresponding ethic, is inferior to one based on "aristocracy and acquisition of separate property" in terms of the survival of the tribe. As we shall see, compared to the work of Sahlins, Lang's understanding of the contradictions involved in the political economy of earliest society is threadbare.

Gladwin (1973) comments on the lack of rigorous research into the logical methods used in earliest society, pointing out the shortcomings of the little work done in this area. He takes as his example the totalising Trukese thought which underpins their navigation techniques, learned from relatives and kept in the family, and compares them with techniques used in contemporary capitalist society. Gladwin's results allow us to speculate on earliest navigation and other skills, whilst providing insights into the complexity of some early thought. He distances himself from Freudian and other psychological approaches, which attempt to measure "intelligence" and deductive skills by such methods as IQ tests, and tries to understand how the Trukese canoeist is able to navigate accurately over vast distances of

Ocean to a tiny dot of land, using no equipment whatever. The Trukese navigator's "information consists of a large number of discrete observations, a combination of motion, sounds, feel of the wind, wave patterns, star relationships, etc", page 114. Gladwin's conclusions are tentative and equivocal, but he rejects the idea that these techniques are merely "inductive", a term often used by those working within the Aryan model to describe all pre-Greek thought. He states that the "total process goes forward without reference to any explicit principles and without any planning...the process...must reflect a high order of intellectual functioning", page 118. Despite the concrete goal of the navigator, it is clear that he must be able to synthesise a mass of information about rapidly changing conditions, a many-sided process clearly transcending dualist logical categories of deduction and induction. Post (1975) similarly records the skill of the Bushmen in finding their way in the Kalahari desert over great distances without reference to maps or instruments.

I end this section with a quote, on page 54 of volume 2 of Lang, from a dialectical Maori cosmogonic myth:

From the conception the increase,

From the increase the swelling,

From the swelling the thought,

From the thought the remembrance,

From the remembrance the desire.

The word became fruitful,

It dwelt with the feeble glimmering,

It brought forth Night.

From the nothing the begetting,

...

It produced the atmosphere which is above us.

...

The atmosphere above dwelt with the glowing sky.

...

Sahlins and the contradictions at the core of earliest society

Sahlins (1974) re-examined the classic studies of hunting and gathering and, contrary to the claims of neo-classical economists, points out that even today some marginalised hunter gatherers spend large parts of their day in leisure and ritual activities, resting or sleeping. Because hunter gatherers spend less time working than the mass of people in all other modes of production, Sahlins comes to very different conclusions from those of the neo-classical economics textbook writers, such as Samuelson and Lipsey, not to mention the classicals like Adam Smith, and the early anthropologists already mentioned. He describes hunting and gathering as the “original affluent society”, in which needs were modest and there existed a state of underproduction. There was a kind of comfort, evidenced by their varying diet, in the poverty of the palaeolithic age compared with poverty in the wealth of contemporary capitalism. Sahlins states ironically: the hunter is “uneconomic man” marked by freedom and lack of servility. Needless to say these aspects of their lives profoundly affected the thinking of hunter gatherers, as is clear when ideas of freedom clashed with the desire to create a proto-state, which developed in some tribes due to the introduction of agricultural techniques.

There existed a sharp division of labour in hunter gatherer societies, based on sex and age; and there were some specialists such as priests, Shamans and craft-workers. However, initially there were no social classes and sharing the product of their respective forms of labour was the norm. For this reason Marx used the term “primitive communism” to refer to these societies. They were nomadic within the boundaries of the tribal territory, because their members must move on as soon as “diminishing returns” to their labour occur in a particular location. The contradiction inherent in primitive communism is that it requires constant movement from location to location, so that society is limited to what it can carry. Although some possessions may be kept in semi-permanent camps, in general there can be little or no technological development, because it is inconsistent with a nomadic lifestyle. Although this mode of production stunts the development of technology and many aspects of culture, it is the case that myth, religion, magic and ritual are well developed in the thinking of at least some of these people. There is also considerable evidence of the development of painting, cooking, embroidery, games, dancing and other activities in earliest society.

Because of the contradiction between wealth and mobility there is little storage of food, as it is pointless, and the production of tools, clothing, utensils and ornaments must be limited. Post (1975) records his difficulty in thinking of an appropriate gift for the Bushmen and women when he leaves them. There is so little that they need because they “see beyond the dialectical obsessions with externals which bedevil our minds”, page 254. Tribal or family numbers must be restricted if their leisurely lifestyle is to be maintained. This has a considerable influence on the ethical thought of members of these societies, evidenced by their resort to infanticide and senilicide, although the practice of sexual restraint is common. Post (1975) records the birth of a child to a !Kung woman during a drought “which threatened the survival of all”, page 242. These people are known for their deep love of children and yet the child was immediately taken by other women and killed. This event, and Post similarly records the way old people are left to die with as much food and water as the tribe can spare, brings into sharp focus the contradiction between the survival of the individual and the survival of the tribe, a contradiction which can only be resolved in favour of the tribe: “Life was only possible for all of us because, in our past, there had been those who had put the claims of life itself before all else”, page 255.

Hunter-gatherers are highly vulnerable, due to their small numbers and lack of technological development, when they come into contact with people who live in different modes of production. It is clear that despite, or because of, its communistic social relations, this mode of production is fragile and hardly survives today. There is a one-sided truth in the neo-classical economists’ articulation of the ‘economic problem’ in that, despite its simple affluence, hardship was commonplace and natural disasters threatened the very existence of the tribal unit. This led many tribes to begin to cultivate food and keep animals for their meat, milk and skins.

With the onset of the neolithic age, from its beginnings in slash and burn forest clearing techniques, the average amount of labour performed each day by tribal members rose. As more tribes became tied to the cultivation and fallow cycle, and the level of technology, storage facilities and population size grew, so also did property, inequality and class differentiation. There were, says Sahlins on page 37: “two contradictory movements: enriching but at the same time impoverishing, appropriating in relation to nature but expropriating in relation to man”. To the extent that they can be meaningfully separated, the inter-relation, or

interpenetration, between economic base and cultural superstructure became more complex in the neolithic mode of production because technology, culture and property relations became more diverse.

Early in the neolithic period production centred around the domestic unit. Although output of the units varied greatly, the communistic ethic remained in the thinking of the mass of tribal members. Therefore sharing and exchange were common, as was the culture which stressed the need to work only until *sufficient*, rather than a surplus, had been produced. As class relationships developed the exploiting class, which partly emerged from the intellectuals, had to destroy this anti-surplus, or underproduction, culture amongst the masses. As was the case with the hunter gatherers, the distinction between work, ritual, play and rest was not well developed either in the practice or the totalised thinking of these early agricultural societies. However, technical knowledge and cultural activities began to diverge in line with the emergence of different social groups, which manifested itself in tensions in the practices and thought of these groups.

As the domestic mode of production, evolves there arises a profound contradiction between the tribe and the individual household, or tribe in miniature, in particular between the growing domestic property interests and those of the group who align themselves with the chief, who exerts a strong influence on the thought of the members of the tribe through religious, magical and kinship means. The household unit tends to want freedom and decentralisation, and sometimes breaks away from the tribe, whereas the chief exerts centralising tendencies and tries to impose a general will. The larger the tribe the greater the tensions and the stronger the political forces in both directions; thus a classic contradiction develops between the forces and relations of production, explains Sahlins in his original analysis. However, individual households sooner or later cease to be able to provide the means for life, and the smaller the domestic or tribal unit the more likely it is to become the victim vis á vis other units. Therefore the chief's power affords a certain security, which influences the thought of the tribe in favour of centralisation. The extent to which the communist ethic in the thought of the hunter-gather decayed in primitive agricultural society is clear in the decline in sharing and increase in theft, though at times of general crisis the tribe tends to pull together. Sahlins gives examples of verbal articulations of the contradictory thinking of these people, which corresponds to the real life contradictions between the tribe and the domestic unit: "Raw food is still possessed,

cooked it goes to another” or “Broil a rat with its fur on, lest you be disturbed by someone”, and similarly with the proverb “A relative in winter, a son in autumn”, pages 125-6. Out of these contradictions emerges the major force for increasing production and raising the level of technology, thereby creating a surplus product, which is the centralising force of the proto-state in the form of the chief. Whatever the chief’s subjective motives may be, such centralisation seems to be the only way to bring to an end the general economic chaos caused by the individualism of the domestic units.

One much discussed aspect of the thought and culture of early agricultural societies is the technique used by chiefs and priests in order to effect centralisation: gift exchange. Sahlins’ claim that this, and barter, represent a market economy in embryo is disputed by some economists and anthropologists. Gift exchange has the effect of increasing the overall level of production, because the chief’s apparent generosity to members of the tribe who are in need leads to a culture of reciprocity and obligation. Sahlins quotes an example of dialectical Eskimo thinking: “Gifts make slaves, as whips make dogs”, adding that the “economic relation of giver-receiver is the political relation of leader-follower” and “everywhere in the world the indigenous category for exploitation is ‘reciprocity’”, pages 133-4. Therefore the chief sets the standard of productivity by supervising the increase in output of his large household and calling other members of the tribe to follow suit, partly to keep up with the new standard of conspicuous consumption but also to repay their obligations in the form of ever more generous gifts to the chief.

In the proto-market relations of the gift, the mystical and magical aspects of the obligations are highly important. A Maori sage, Tamati Ranapire, cited by Sahlins produced a text which introduces a key concept in Maori thinking: the *hau*, which roughly translates as fecundity, material yield, fertility, etc. However, according to Sahlins, these concepts in no way do justice to the totalising term *hau*, which has economic, legal, political, social, religious and magical aspects as its component parts. Failure to observe the reciprocity of *hau*, or to steal, would result in the tribal priest or magician casting a spell in order to punish the wrong-doer and thereby maintain justice in this alienated society. So there develops a virtuous circle, such that the greater the power of the chief the greater the surplus of the tribe, and the greater the surplus the greater the power of the chief. To the extent that a chief is successful in raising productivity, tribal strife, and tensions between rival tribes, reduces, and his support grows.

Sahlins quotes a member of a Tikopian tribe who states: “When the land is firm people pay respect to the things of the chief, but when there is a famine people go and make sport of them”, page 143. Feasts organised by the Tikopian chiefs impel people “to participate in forms of co-operation which for the time being go far beyond his personal interests and those of his family and reach the bounds of the whole community. Such a feast gathers together chiefs and their clansfolk who at other times are rivals ready to criticise and slander each other, but who assemble here with an outward show of amity... (and) support the Tikopia system of authority”, quoted on page 190.

Chiefs may try to increase the surplus by conquest; but if this fails to result in a greater surplus the chances of rebellion are large, especially amongst members of newly conquered tribes. At this stage of development there is no proto-state, and therefore no monopoly of the means of violence. Sahlins concludes that the primitive agricultural mode of production “discovered limits to its ability to augment production and polity, this threshold which it had reached but could not cross was the boundary of primitive society itself”, page 148.

To the extent that this mode of production begins to be transcended, and trade with “strangers” develops, the Siuai “native moralists assert that neighbours should be friendly and mutually trustful, whereas people from far-off are dangerous and unworthy of morally just consideration. For example, natives lay great stress on honesty involving neighbours while holding that trade with strangers may be guided by *caveat emptor*”, Sahlins page 191. In contrast to this mode of thinking, Malinowski suggests that amongst Trobriand Islanders boundaries between barter or trade on the one hand and gift exchange on the other start to break down, paving the way for more generalised impersonal trade relationships. As trade became more generalised, a concept crucial for the history of dialectical thinking emerged: Buso traders came to realise the difference between the exchange-value and use-value aspects of commodities, as is clear in the following:

I was interested to observe when accompanying some Busama on a trading journey southwards how the Buso (pottery) villagers kept exaggerating the labour involved in pot making. ‘We toil all day long at it from sunrise to sunset’, one man told us over and over again....The members of our party murmured polite agreement but subsequently brought the conversation round to the inferior quality of present-day pots, quoted in Sahlins, page 289.

In *Capital* Marx credited Aristotle with the discovery of this crucial distinction in *The Politics*. However, it seems likely that early traders were able to conceptualise the tensions involved in their activities. It is clear that the Buso have gone beyond Aristotle in realising the *basis* of exchange-value, labour, as well as implicitly distinguishing between quantity and quality.

Although trade began to flourish, in the long run, as with the palaeolithic mode of production, the mass of early agricultural domestic producers were doomed, says Sahlins, because:

Nothing within the structure of production for use pushes it to transcend itself. The entire society is constructed on an obstinate economic base, therefore on a contradiction, because unless the domestic economy is forced beyond itself the entire society does not survive. Economically, primitive society is founded on an antisociety, page 86.

The German Ideology, Marx and Engels (1974), contains a dialectically formulated discussion of division of labour, including some points relevant to the present discussion. Commenting on the division of labour based on gender and age in earliest society, they say: "The division of labour is at this stage still very elementary and is confined to a further extension of the natural division of labour existing in the family. The social structure is, therefore, limited to an extension of the family; patriarchal family chieftains, below them the members of the tribe, finally slaves. The slavery latent in the family only develops gradually with the increase of population, the growth of wants, and with the extension of external relations, both of war and of barter.", page 44. "...there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops spontaneously or 'naturally' by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g. physical strength), needs, accidents, etc. etc. Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, *priests*, is concurrent.) From this moment onwards consciousness *can* flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. comes into contradiction with existing relations, this can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production...the forces of production, the state of society, and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with

one another, because the *division of labour* implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity - enjoyment and labour, production and consumption - devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour.”, page 52. These remarks are highly relevant to the discussion of the state capitalist mode of production in Chapter nine.

Gender contradictions in earliest society

Marx and Engels point out that the implicit contradictions in “the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, is given simultaneously the *distribution*, and indeed the *unequal* distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form, of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property, but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists, who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others. Division of labour and private property are, moreover, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity”, pages 52-3.

Marx and Engels’ ideas on division of labour and gender contradictions in earliest society are demonstrated by Lang (1995) who notes that tribal Mysteries were often hidden from women. This suggests that the struggle between men and women was already well developed, and anticipates ancient Greece where the privileges associated with mental labour were restricted to men. Similarly, there is evidence of gender contradictions in Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992), speaking of the Umeda semi-nomadic people of New Guinea, Gell comments on their “sharing ethos...and corresponding lack of interest in amassing personal property...Umeda women had the ‘sexy’, rather than ‘reproductive’, image...the basic theme in Umeda society was male sexual rivalry, fired up by the capriciousness and sexual manipulateness of women”, page 154. Gell goes on to hint at male dominance by the use of terms like wife-receiving, wife-giving, sister exchange and woman-debt in the social reproduction of this society. The boundaries of societies like this “are a male preserve, physically and symbolically, because men are specialists in hunting and violence. In the hinterland, barter trading is masculine and disarticulated from social reproduction - in particular from the processes of the

Indigenous Service Economy, and the inequalities inherent in affinity. At the margins of the world, men encounter other men in war and trade, but not as parties interested in reproducing one another. In this mutual disinterestedness there is exhilaration, danger (violence is never far from the surface) but also solace.”, page 158. Gell adds “The peripheral barter-exchange schema provides an idiom for an all-male social universe, weakening the position of women accordingly. Moreover, as this transactionalisation and masculinisation of the process of social reproduction takes place, the Indigenous Service Economy becomes an almost all-female affair, in which male participation becomes more and more marginal.”, page 162. “The open sea plays the same role as in this as the ‘frontier area’ between tribes plays in the hinterland trade, i.e. it is given over to the masculinity and female influences must be shunned there (though attacks by flying witches are an ever-present possibility). Long-distance seaborne trade is the last bastion of the masculine republic, and the sea itself comes to be a sort of nature-reserve for men, when all else has been lost through the active presence, or even predominance, of women in commodity exchange.”, page 166.

Another social tension is identified when Gell explains the terms of the barter of fish for sago between the women of the Murik and Iatmul tribes. The terms are grossly unfair to the Murik women; but this state of affairs is explained by the ‘military protection’ which in their hey-day the Iatmul ‘mothers’ provided to a third tribe, the Chambri, but did not extend to the Murik. Marilyn Strathern, in the same text, comments on a similarly unequal barter relationship based on a more general social inequality between Iatmul and Sawos women. Generally the readings in this text are a mish-mash of neo-classical and Marxist ideas on barter, for example the authors provide no definition of terms like *commodity* and *mode of production*. However, they reject neo-classical ideas on both the double co-incidence of wants, the ‘disutility of barter’, and the idea that barter is just a stage in the development of a money-based commodity economy: “Barter may even serve as a solution to the problems of money”, they say on page 4.

The last two readings explain the reproductive and expansionary effects of gift exchange, the peripheral nature of barter and the relevance of gender tensions. Marilyn Strathern’s reading ends the book with a dialectical approach to barter in Melanesia: “At the moment of exchange, an analogy is created between the kind of regard that two parties have for each other; they exchange perspectives. One view is compared with another, a totalising moment.”, page 181.

Speaking of vegetable sellers she says they: “would throw away produce or take it home at the end of the day rather than sell at a price that would diminish its value through an inappropriate match. The vendor’s produce is to be extracted from her by the buyer, who is the cause of her selling, but as long as it is in her possession, its origin in other relationships remains.”, page 186. Strathern ends by adding: “Items in themselves, then, carry no guarantee of equivalence, not even two identical looking pigs, for in terms of particular social relations, in reference to cause and origin, no two things are qualitatively equivalent. This pig was reared by that partner, that by another. Rather, they are made equivalent units in the process of the substitution of relations. We might think of this unity as a reification, the aesthetic form which comparison takes...Uncertainty is reinforced at every stage. Far from exchange relations providing some secure integrative framework, they problematise interactions by challenging persons to decompose themselves, to make internal capacities external”, pages 187-8.

Strathern is reminiscent of *Hegel’s Logic* when she says of bride exchange between two groups and tribal counting: “At the base of both operations is an assumption about number: namely that there are occasions on which many ‘is the same as’ one. A collectivity or multiplicity of units can always be represented as a single unit, insofar *as its unity is elicited* in turn by other social identities. Thus the line of dancers (or component groups within a clan) acts as one in confrontation with their exchange partners/audience. They evince magnitude. Yet they are not being added together...Or, we might say, where ‘one’ has two forms, as a unit or as a pair. (‘Two is not a plurality, but one in another form, viz. the joining of halves or moieties or the alliances of mutualities.)”, page 183-4. Strathern is far ahead, not only in her dialectical formulations but also in her economic and social understanding, of the other writers in the text, who fail in their claim to see barter in “the light of its social context”, page 2, and approvingly quote Marshall’s views on marginal utility and ‘true equilibrium’. They do not explain the social processes and contradictions involved in the hunter gatherer and early agricultural modes of production, thus failing to see that the gender, and other, relations of most of the societies they mention are mediated by colonialism and capitalist commodity exchange.

Magic and Religion in Earliest Society

Having studied both the practical life and general thought of earliest society, we can now move onto a more detailed look at religion, magic and related thought. The work of James Frazer presents earliest society in a way that is typical of the British colonial world view. In his abridgement of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer (1991) highlights what he considers to be the contradiction between early thought based on magic and that based on religion. According to the philosophy of magic society and nature conform to fixed laws, whereas according to religion they are ruled by capricious gods. Frazer sees contradiction because he insists on positing a fixed duality between religion and magic, failing to locate these two modes of thinking in the practical reality and totalising thought of earliest society. As we have noted, earliest societies live very close to nature and experience natural and social phenomena as both regular and cyclical, or apparently law-like, but at other times as arbitrary and chaotic. Consequently, taking account of the appropriate social mediations, their contradictory attitudes to magic and religion correspond to the practical reality of their lives.

Frazer's explanation of magic, based on the principles of similarity and contagion, is accurate as far as it goes; but his approach is positivistic, as opposed to totalising and dialectical. However, he argues that magic is proto-science, with its references to *forces* in its attempts to describe cause and effect relationships for natural and social phenomena. The magician attempts to harness his or her knowledge for a variety of purposes, which include providing subsistence for the tribe, often popularly called *white magic*, or alternatively providing a system of justice which punishes anti-social behaviour by tribal members, often referred to as *black magic*.

Frazer realises that magic, religion, myth and other modes of thought are merely ways of mediating social relationships. They bolster the intellectual division of labour, and mediate between social factions or classes and between a simultaneously ordered and chaotic nature. As most anthropologists point out, some tribes, though by no means all, develop totems, normally an animal which is important in their immediate environment. The totem functions in a number of ways, most notably to limit the possibilities for sexual relations, reproduction and marriage. As a general rule, though not always, these are taboo amongst people of the same totem. It is to Frazer's credit that he, unlike many thinkers, notes the totalising connections

between the totem and magic based on both contagion and similarity in their negative, or prohibitive, forms. Thought in “savage” society is, according to Frazer, democratic and anthropomorphic, it posits men-gods or women-gods, whose personalities contain all the strengths and weaknesses of mere mortals. Therefore, he claims, the art of the priest is to make sacrifices, or provide other gifts, in order to please or placate the jealous, avaricious or fickle tribal god.

Lewis (1969), although by no means consistent in his views, disagrees with Frazer on the latter’s interpretation of the “savage’s” attitude to the natural and supernatural. Unlike us, says Lewis, the “savage” makes no fixed dualist distinction between these two realms: the tribe, nature, God and the other supernatural forces are one. The totalising Shaman, priest or magician taps into whatever forces are available and useful for the achievement of given practical results. However, he or she, and to varying degrees all members of the tribe, says Lewis, also use ceremonies and symbols in summoning these forces in order to powerfully express the tribe’s “attitudes, desires and hopes”, page 153, in the same way that art, and other cultural activities, function in contemporary society. This, claims Lewis, has the effect of boosting the psychological well-being of the tribe, preventing accidents caused by hostile forces, curing illness, improving the providence of nature, and in turn promoting co-operation and the fulfilment of obligations. In fact magic and its functions become even more complex and all encompassing when they begin to represent the means of legitimising class society, or the beginning of “crude government”. Read (1995) says:

what we know of the most backward people now extant makes it highly probable that Magic was the sanction for their crude government, supplemented sooner or later by Animism or belief in the influence of spirits, and the consequent growth of kingship and priesthoods. And these beliefs in Magic and Animism...not only made possible the beginning of government...but ever since have had a potent share in maintaining and directing it..,pages xiii-xiv.

Like Frazer, Read stresses that magic, which he calls superstition, does not “work” and therefore represents a false belief in the ability of supernatural powers to influence events in the natural world. Yet he makes the following profound dialectical comment, which is reminiscent of Lukacs: “Spells, being thought of as forces, are reified; so that blessings or curses cling to their objects like garlands, or like contaminating rags”, page 53, which

highlights the principal form of alienation to which earliest men and women were subject. Early magicians are in part attempting to discover cause and effect relationships in nature; as a result of their relationships with nature and other tribal members, they developed a complex metaphysics involving the interplay between the forces of magic and capricious anthropomorphic gods.

As the contradictions of agricultural society develop, magic becomes a focus and sanction for all manner of social relationships. Thus, on the one hand primitive communism declines and relationships of increasing inequality, status and power emerge, yet on the other hand important mutually beneficial relationships are maintained, and magic reinforces both. Read (1995) realises this when speaking of magic in terms of the “sympathy and antipathy between families, parties, tribes...so that beliefs become fashionable, endemic, coercive, impassioned and intolerant”, page 14. Implying the existence of social contradictions based on the division of labour, Read adds: “even at a low level of culture individuals are found for whom common sense constitutes a private standard, and who are sceptics in relation to their tribal beliefs. But such a private standard cannot be communicated, and for the great majority of the tribesmen common sense is no confident guide; and perhaps they are even incapable of effectively comparing their ideas”, page 19. This quote, despite its colonialist assumptions, raises the important issue of ideological dissent, and its relation to social contradictions, as manifested in challenges to tribal magic, religion and other aspects of the culture of early society. However these early anthropologists in their haste to prove that magic “does not work” fail to see the depth of the complex social tensions reified in the practice of magic in early agricultural society.

Nataf (1994) points out that even the earliest magic represents highly developed and dialectical thinking in so far as it relies on the use of analogy. Analogy stresses the common features of two phenomena, allowing “us to pass from the known to the unknown, from the phenomenon to the noumenon and from the visible to the invisible...the microcosm and the macrocosm...scientific causality proceeds by means of the dogmatic division of the world, whereas analogy takes each fragment of the real world and fits it into the whole of which it is a part. The two procedures are complementary and it is a great pity to neglect either one of them”, page 10. Alleau claims that “Complete identification by analogy is never achieved; by definition, the analogy can never be complete. So analogy remains open to the interplay of

consequences and changing relationships brought about by the introduction of additional experimental or conceptual information into the concrete whole. The dynamic process of analogy therefore has a legitimate place within any dialectical process”, quoted in Nataf, page 10. We can compare this quote with one from Read (1995) who takes a colonialist view of early or “savage” society and speaks of “remote and absurd analogies...there is no logic at hand and not enough common sense to distinguish the wildest imaginative analogies from trustworthy conclusions”, page 16.

The magic practised by the Dogon people is typical of African totalising thought in that it includes esoteric, or secret, elements which are rich in images that, anticipating Chapter Two, formed the basis of later Egyptian mystery cults. The first principle learned by the initiate is the importance of analogy, particularly that paradoxical one between the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (the universe). The second principle concerns the contradictory relationship between the visible and the invisible, although Nataf fails to explain the social basis of these polarities. There is ample evidence that tribal initiates learned a cosmology based on the interplay between the four elements: fire, water, earth and air, which were so important to subsequent ancient cosmology.

Magic, in sharp contrast to its central role in early society, has by and large become a middle-class cult in contemporary capitalism; an amalgam of conspicuous consumption items located in the Mind-Body-Spirit department. Religion too is ceasing to be a key component of a totalising philosophy and becomes compartmentalised in the lives of most of today’s believers, something one thinks about on the Sabbath, along with shopping, as part of the recuperation from the weekday stresses of work or business.

There is a debate amongst anthropologists and others as to the early development of monotheism, and the extent to which it represents progress beyond polytheistic beliefs prevalent in earliest society. Bernal persuasively argues that these debates derived more from projections of the religious views of the researchers than an attempt to understand the thinking of earliest society. Although Lewis states that “polytheism belongs to a higher level of social development than that of tribal and village life”, page 180; on the same page he goes on to present the sort of argument described by Bernal when he states: “ *The One God* concept is generally regarded as a very late development in which religion merges with philosophy. Even

the Hebrews were not monotheists at first...*monotheism...is the culmination and not the origin of the religious quest*". Read tries to penetrate more deeply when he claims that the development of more formal religious systems, both polytheistic and monotheistic, represents the formation of a class-based agricultural society with an established hereditary priest class, which grows out of early hunter gatherer magical and religious thought. He explains how the caprice of the gods becomes a seemingly rational explanation for the failure of magic, as proto-science, to solve practical problems:

As the gods emerge from the shadow of night and the grave, and are cleansed from the savour of corruption, and withdraw to the summit of the world, they are no longer regarded with the shuddering fear that ghosts excite; as they acquire the rank of chiefs and kings, the sentiments of attachment, awe, duty, reliance, loyalty, proper to the service of such superiors, are directed to them; and since their power far exceeds that of kings, and implies the total dependence of man and nature upon their support and guidance, these sentiments - often amazingly strong toward earthly rulers - may toward the gods attain to the intensest heat of fanaticism. Extolled by priests and poets, the attributes of the gods are magnified, until difficulties occur to a reflective mind as to how any other powers can exist contrary to, or even apart from, them: so that philosophical problems arise as to the existence of evil and responsibility, page 116.

Read then discusses the contradictory relationship between the priests and magicians on the one side and members of the tribe on the other. It seems that tribal accusations of charlatanism are commonplace, so that "failure" demands ever more sophisticated explanations which constantly test the intellectual aptitude of the priest or magician.

Lang (1995) sees a mass of contradictions in earliest magical and religious thought. In keeping with most early anthropologists, he attempts to resolve them by reference to those reified aspects of capitalist thought which stress compartmentalisation and the particular. Typically life under capitalism is split into work, recreation, worship, shopping, and so on. In each sphere a separate, and appropriate mode of behaviour and thought is adopted, the contradictions arising from these separate spheres are suppressed by attempting to maintain an arbitrary separation. So for Lang religion, myth, magic, totemism, science and the practical activities necessary for subsistence in earliest society are analysed in the same way. In earliest society, with its tendency towards totalising thought, the particularised contradictions

expressed by Lang are not experienced by members of these societies as they are today. Life is experienced, and theorised, more as an integrated whole, in which what may be interpreted as contradictions or antagonisms are idealised as contrasting experiences, thoughts and emotions.

Lang notes the characteristics of the early Australian chief of demons, Turramullun, author of disease, mischief and wisdom. He goes on to identify what he takes to be a conflict between Aborigine notions of religious contemplation and submission, which are occult and kept secret, *and* their myths which are variously humorous, obscene and fanciful: “The moods are present, and in conflict, through the whole religious history of the human race. They stand as near each other, and as far apart, as Love and Lust”, page 5, “in the religions of even the lowest races, such myths as these are in contradiction with the ethical elements of the faith”, page 10. Similarly Lang quotes Emeric-David as concluding “that these animals, plants, and monsters of myths are so many “enigmas” and “symbols” veiling some deep, sacred idea, allegories of some esoteric religious creed”, page 11.

Because of his monotheistic and colonialist world view, Lang reduces the integrated thought of earliest “savages” to logical contradictions. He notes immortal gods who feel “fear and pain...the stars are mixed up with beasts, planets and men in the same embroglio of fantastic opinion. The dead and the living, men, beasts and gods, trees and stars, and rivers, and sun, and moon, dance through the region of myths in a burlesque *ballet* of Priapus, where everything may be anything, where nature has no laws and imagination no limits”, page 13. Yet, in a mode of thought reminiscent of Feuerbach, Lang states: “Man found that his gods, when mythically envisaged, were not made in his own moral image at its best, but in the image sometimes of the beasts, sometimes of his own moral nature at its very worst: in the likeness of robbers, wizards, sorcerers, and adulterers”, page 14.

I end this section by making the point that the dialectical thought of earliest society, in particular the emphasis on the metamorphoses of animals to humans to gods, profoundly influenced later thinkers. Marx’s economic thinking, for example, despite his attacks on ‘mystification’, ‘idealism’ and the like, often uses the term *metamorphosis* to describe the change in physical form of one commodity when it is exchanged for another.

Radin and social differentiation

Paul Radin (1927) introduces the idea that the division of labour between intellectuals and those who perform predominantly manual work, whose thought is mainly concerned with the achievement of practical outcomes, is crucial the study of earliest thought. He sees the intellectuals, such as medicine-men or -women, poets, magicians and priests, as the main contributors to earliest philosophy, and rejects the approach taken by most anthropologists, which sees earliest society as composed of more or less undifferentiated tribal groups. However, the theme is not well developed in Radin's work; he is unaware of the social dynamic which exists between the proto-classes of earliest society, and restricts himself to the modest goal of describing "primitive cultures in terms of their intellectual class, from the viewpoint of their thinkers", page 5.

Radin claims that the bulk of people in earliest tribal society did not have deep religious convictions, these being reserved for the intellectuals. His research suggests that, rather like today, the majority of tribal members expressed only a limited commitment to the tribal religion and its culture. Their religious beliefs and ceremonies were closely connected to the achievement of their practical goals, and acted as an extra means of attempting to ensure success. He contrasts this with the philosophical thought of the primitive intellectual, illustrated in the following Maori poem, which contains references to such totalising concepts as life, power, seed and light, as well as a number of oppositions:

Seeking, earnestly seeking in the gloom. Searching - yes on the coast line - on the bounds of night and day; looking into night. Night had conceived the seed of night. The heart, the foundation of night, had stood forth self-existing even in the gloom. It grows in gloom - the sap and succulent parts, the life pulsating, and the cup of life. The shadows screen the faintest ray of light. The procreative power, the ecstasy of life first known, and joy of issuing forth from silence into sound. Thus the progeny of the Great-Extending filled the heaven's expanse; the chorus of life rose and swelled into ecstasy, then rested in bliss of calm and quiet, page 238.

An Hawaiian poem which he quotes shows similar totalising tendencies in the way that it identifies water in the following forms:

..at sea, on the ocean, In the driving rain, In the heavenly bow, In the piled-up mist-wraith, In the blood-red rainfall, In the ghost-like cloud-form...In the heavenly blue, In the black piled cloud, In the black, black cloud, In the black-mottled sacred cloud of the gods...Deep in the ground, in the gushing spring...A water of magic power - The water of life!

The work of Claude Lévi-Strauss

The savage mind totalises...it is in this intransigent refusal on the part of the savage mind to allow anything human (or even living) to remain alien to it, that the real principle of dialectical reason is to be found. Lévi-Strauss (1966), page 245.

Lévi-Strauss (1994) is in part a tribute to the analysis of Paul Radin, particularly his fieldwork amongst the Winnebago people. Lévi-Strauss summarises a myth which concerns "two friends, one of them a chief's son, who decide to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of the community. After their death, they undergo a series of ordeals in the underworld, and finally reach the lodge of Earthmaker, who permits them to become reincarnated and to resume their previous lives among their relatives and friends", page 199. Lévi-Strauss explains that their sacrifice grants extra life expectancy to the two friends and the rest of the tribe, and sets up an opposition between ordinary and heroic life and between final death and death "swinging between life and death", page 201. Whilst drawing attention to these "oppositions", in keeping with structuralism, Lévi-Strauss then "transforms" them into grids of "correlations" and other relationships. This grid technique has the effect of adopting too formal an approach to the real social contradictions that underpin the myth.

Lévi-Strauss' anthropological works are concerned in large measure with the thinking of surviving "savage" people. Despite his frequent adoption of some of Sartre's dialectical formulations, such as the one quoted at the beginning of this section, Lévi-Strauss' "transformations" are central to his methodology:

The characteristic feature of the savage mind is its timelessness; its object is to grasp the world as both a synchronic and a diachronic totality and the knowledge which it draws therefrom is like that afforded of a room by mirrors fixed on opposite walls; which reflect each other...The savage mind...builds mental structures which facilitate an understanding of

the world in as much as they resemble it. In this sense savage thought can be defined as analogical thought. Lévi-Strauss (1966) page 263.

Structuralist methodology, which was developed in opposition to existentialism, or the “shop-girl’s philosophy” as Lévi-Strauss described it, quoted in Leach (1970) page 14, has since become highly influential in anthropology and elsewhere. The dualist social oppositions of the kind developed above are based on de Saussure’s and Jakobson’s structuralist linguistics. These correspond, claims Lévi-Strauss, apparently unaware of the existence of social tensions and perpetual, if sometimes very slow, change, to transformations of structures which already exist in both nature and the human mind. He reifies the mind, in effect treating it as a *thing*, and seeks to find its universal properties, its structure. It is a commonplace to claim that things have forms or structures, but dialectical thought identifies the mind as simultaneously natural and social, it is both the organ of thought and a mediator of relationships, it has no *fixed* structure. Recent neurological research supports this by showing that the electro-chemical makeup of the mind is forever changing according to its relationship with nature and society.

In the next chapter we shall examine what Bernal calls the Aryan, or Eurocentric, model. Lévi-Strauss opposes this racist view when he claims that all societies are, if only potentially, equally sophisticated; only their systems of notation differ, but their thought structures are universally valid. He states: “The savage mind is logical in the same sense as ours, though as our own is only when it is applied to knowledge of a universe in which it recognises physical and semantic properties simultaneously.” Lévi-Strauss (1966), page 268. However, Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist method, which insists on the timeless and static nature of primitive society: “societies with no history”, not only prevents him from conducting a study of the thought of people in earliest society which takes account of its social dynamic, but also makes inevitable his failure to see the mutual dependency of form and content, collapsing the latter into the former. He shares this deficiency with functionalist anthropologists, who overstress the static forms of early society and similarly omit the dynamic content which, however gradually, leads to new forms.

The development of post-structuralism was a reaction to the sort of binary logic used by Lévi-Strauss in his positing of such static oppositions as: raw and cooked, life and death, nature and culture, id and ego, conscious and unconscious, self-interest and tribal morality, and the matrix

style structures and naturalistic analogies developed from them. In reality none of these examples are fixed polar opposites, they all inter-penetrate; even raw food is simultaneously cultural and natural, because all uncooked food is the product of a social process. Similarly in his discussion of the relationship between science and magic Lévi-Strauss (1966) says that “magic postulates a complete and all embracing determinism”, page 11. Whilst this Frazer-like remark is true, it is one-sided because, in constructing his taxonomy of magic, he fails to see its complex social context, its part in the totalising thought of early society. The fixed duality science-magic, like the ones modern-savage and myth-art, cannot do justice to the change and tension which, despite Lévi-Strauss’s claims to the contrary, exists in all societies.

I close this section with a quote from Lévi-Strauss’ *Savage Mind* in which he gives a dialectical description of contradictions involved in the way the Hidatsa Indians hunt eagles “by hiding in pits. The eagle is attracted by a bait placed on top and the hunter catches it with his bare hands as it perches to take the bait. And so the technique presents a kind of paradox. Man is the trap but to play this part he has to go down into the pit, that is, to adopt the position of a trapped animal. He is both hunter and hunted at the same time. The wolverine is the only animal which knows how to deal with this contradictory situation: not only has it not the slightest fear of the traps set for it; it actually competes with the trapper by stealing his prey and sometimes even his traps. It follows...that the ritual importance of eagle hunting among the Hidatsa is at least partly due to the use of pits, to the assumption by the hunter of a particularly *low* position (literally as we have just seen, figuratively as well) for capturing a quarry which is in the very *highest* position in an objective sense (eagles fly high) and also from a mythical point of view (the eagle being at the top of the mythical hierarchy of birds....)”, pages 50-51.

Leach's criticisms of structuralism

As a result of his limited methodology, argues the anthropologist Leach, Lévi-Strauss’s work is never extended enough to get to grips with his object of study:

He always seems to be able to find just what he is looking for...wherever the data runs counter to the theory Lévi-Strauss will either by-pass the evidence or marshal the full resources of his powerful invective to have the heresy thrown out of court!, Leach (1970) page 20.

However, we can in turn see the limits of Leach's functionalist approach, mixed with Popperian falsificationism, to "primitive" thought when, for example, he explains Lévi-Strauss's structuralist methodology by use of an analogy with a set of traffic lights. Leach admits that this example is, as far as he is aware, never actually used by Lévi-Strauss himself, but is typical of the latter's approach to "savage" thought. A structuralist approach begins with the natural relationship between the colours of the spectrum corresponding to red, amber and green. The structuralist claims that these colours are perceived by the human brain, according to their wavelengths and luminosity, as discrete segments in which red and green are accepted as "opposites" in the same way as we accept the "opposition" in black and white. Because of its natural property of being at the mid-point of the luminosity spectrum, yellow forms a triad mid-point between red and green. There follows a transformation of this natural triad into a cultural context; Leach mentions the "natural" association between red and blood, and could in similar vein have noted that between green and grass. This observation prepares us for the association between red and stop, or danger, and we could add that between green and go or "natural", which exists in many cultures. It is then easy to develop the structuralist row matrix: red-amber-green, stop-caution-go corresponding to the British traffic light which represents a transformation of the natural into the cultural.

The significance of the argument for Leach is not made clear, other than as an example of the kind of transformation regularly made by Lévi-Strauss. However, its implication is that drivers, pedestrians and others readily accept this arbitrary cultural product, the traffic light, because it is a transformed natural relationship having as its base a corresponding structure in both the light spectrum and the human brain. Hodge and Kress (1988) discuss Leach's traffic light example, although one could easily find other instances of such nature-culture transformations applied to societies and subject them to similar criticism. They point out that the stop-caution-go triad could be replaced by any arbitrary system of signs, such as one-two-three, and frequently are when the lights break down and hand signals are used. The authors argue that the acceptance of these signs by any individual is mediated by the realisation that a minority of road users jump or ignore the lights. To truly understand the social dynamic of the traffic light involves knowledge of commodity production, including the need for workers to get to work, for commodities to be moved between factory, warehouse and shop, and the sanctions available to police and courts, in short the totality of capitalist social relations.

The point of this traffic light analogy is that to understand the thought involved in a particular cultural product, it needs to be perceived in the context of its part in the totality of life of the society concerned. Although Lévi-Strauss does sometimes try to do this, especially when he applies some of Freud's dialectical formulations to primitive myths, or mentions societies' different experience of time, he is often content to construct a matrix of the product and posit its conformity to some universal aspect of the human mind.

Language is very important in Lévi-Strauss' work, which claims the use of symbols is what distinguishes humans from all other life forms. He points to the links between words and the practical reality of their user. Chapter One of *The Savage Mind* presents numerous examples of how different societies develop either abstract general words or detailed subdivisions according to their *praxis*. However, commenting on Lévi-Strauss's view of language as the key to the distinction between human beings and their culture on the one hand, and animals and the rest of nature on the other, Leach states: "verbal categories provide the mechanism through which *universal* structural characteristics of human brains are transformed into *universal* structural characteristics of human culture", emphasis in the original, page 38. These structures, says Leach, are innate and represent an "algebraic matrix of possible permutations and combinations located in the unconscious 'human mind'", page 42.

These quotes from Leach show the anti-empiricist pro-Freudian position adopted by Lévi-Strauss in his studies of "savage" thought. With reference to his objective idealist structures, or matrices, Leach asks: where are they located? The answer seems to lie in the collective unconscious of psycho-analysis: myths operating in men and women without their knowledge. In rejecting myth as "a universal primitive non-rational logic", Lévi-Strauss interprets them as manifestations of Freudian unconscious wishes. Lévi-Strauss's strengths, such as his dialectical articulations, and weaknesses, notably his attempted reduction to pure form, are suggested in the following, quoted on page 58 of Leach:

All the paradoxes conceived by the native mind, on the most diverse planes: geographic, economic, sociological, and even cosmological, are, when all is said and done, assimilated to that less obvious yet so real paradox which marriage with the matrilineal cousin attempts but fails to resolve. But the failure is admitted in our own myths, and there precisely lies their function.

Finally, Leach shows his affinity to the thought of Sahlins when he comments on Lévi-Strauss' discussion of the Hidatsa: "in the thinking of the Hidatsa, such practical economic matters as hunting and agriculture are inextricably entangled with attitudes towards cosmology, sanctity, food, women, life and death, and certainly this is diametrically opposed to our own contemporary fashion which lays down that, in order to rate as rational scientists, we must keep facts and values entirely separate. Our thinking is the product of a Culture alienated from Nature: that of the Hidatsa derives from a Culture integrated with Nature", page 119.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think*

Lévy-Bruhl (1926) is probably the most dialectical of the colonialist orientated anthropologists who speak of "inferior races", page 29. He implicitly acknowledges the existence of a 'savage' or tribal dialectics, part of an esoteric "natural philosophy", compensating for a lack of technical knowledge. At worst he claims that this mode of thinking contrasts sharply with the 'civilised' thought of "men of our own type", page 14. However, at times he acknowledges the influence of tribal dialectics on contemporary thought. *Mysticism* is the name he gives to the tribal "belief in forces and influences and actions which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real", page 38. By reference to these "forces" he gives examples of totalising representational tribal thought. The problem with Lévy-Bruhl's analysis is that it presents this "mysticism" in a one-sided way by exaggerating its all pervasiveness. As Horton (1967) points out members of earliest society, like people today, find "common sense is the handier and more economical tool for coping with a wide range of circumstances in everyday life. Nevertheless, there are certain circumstances that can only be coped with in terms of a wider causal vision than common sense provides. And in these circumstances there is a jump to theoretical thinking", page 60.

Although Lévy-Bruhl oversimplifies, as in his claim that tribal thought is "prelogical" because it fails to recognise cause and effect or distinguish between subject and object, some of his examples raise important issues. A penetrating illustration is tribal views on names, which are part of the totalising relations between tribes and their sub-divisions, totems and ultimately their whole philosophy. This contrasts with a person's name in contemporary capitalism, where most names correspond to the largely arbitrary, routine and trivial nature of the 'culture'. This shallow "spectacular" culture imposes itself on the anthropologists' interpretation of

tribal thought, in particular, explains Lévy-Bruhl, tribal myth. Because we possess little sense of their totalising mystical atmosphere, our translation of their myth is a “betrayal”, an “inanimate corpse which remains after the vital spark has fled”, page 370. As we shall see this point could equally be applied to the translation of ancient and classical texts, such as Plato who is made to sound like one of the chaps in the senior common room.

Lévy-Bruhl (1926) sums up the difference between tribal thought and the static dualism of much 20th century thought when he says: “The superstitious man, and frequently also the religious man, among us, believes in a twofold order of reality, the one visible, palpable, and subordinate to the essential laws of motion; the other invisible, intangible, ‘spiritual’, forming a mystic sphere which encompasses the first. But the primitive’s mentality does not recognise two distinct worlds in contact with each other, and more or less interpenetrating. To him there is but one. Every reality, like every influence, is mystic, and consequently every perception is also mystic.”, page 68. Like Sahlins, Lévy-Bruhl seeks to explain, and express an element of regret at, the move away from totalising tribal thought towards a more analytical mode, which stresses the reified distinction between subject and object.

Evans-Pritchard on Lévy-Bruhl

Evans-Pritchard (1965) is the archetypal British upper class anthropologist. His approach is one of "getting at the facts" by fieldwork, though he seems unaware of the problems associated with the study of the thinking of 'primitive' peoples. The text is a review of the various anthropological approaches to understanding early religious thought. Evans-Pritchard rejects Tylor's concept of animism, whilst arguing that Durkheim's understanding of the Polynesian totalising notion *mana* is lacking in subtlety; although he draws attention to what he thinks is positive in each anthropologist's work. He gives examples from the work of Darwin and Galton, which shows the kind of abuse heaped on earliest society as a result of the Eurocentric colonial view. His most positive remarks are reserved for the work of Lévy-Bruhl, who draws attention to the fact that for "prelogical" thinkers "Objects and beings are all involved in a network of mystical participations and exclusions... They are reasonable, but they reason in categories different from ours", page 81-2. Moreover they do not try to avoid contradictions.

Evans-Pritchard continues: "primitive man sees an object as we see it, but he perceives it differently, for as soon as he gives conscious attention to it, the mystical idea of the object comes between him and the object, and transforms its purely objective properties...a primitive man does not perceive a leopard and believe that it is his totem-brother. What he perceives is his totem-brother. The physical qualities of a leopard are fused in the mystical representation of totem, and are subordinated to it...it is the mystical which evoke the perceptions", page 83-4. He makes the point more forcefully than Lévy-Bruhl that none of this prevents 'primitive' people from being able to act in the appropriate way in order to achieve required practical goals. Evans-Pritchard notes that they "live closer to the harsh realities of nature, which permit survival only to those who are guided in their pursuits by observation, experiment and reason", page 89. He assails Lévy-Bruhl because he plays down the extent to which western thought today is "mystical" or "prelogical". However, Evans-Pritchard's own thinking is often a paradigm of the reified positivistic thought so pervasive in capitalist society.

Lévy-Bruhl's final writings

I have not been sufficiently careful when speaking of 'contradiction', Lévy-Bruhl (1975) page 7.

To be, to exist, is to participate...If participation were not established, already real, the individuals would not exist. Thus the question is not: here are objects, individuals, how can they participate with each other?, Lévy-Bruhl, pages 16 and 18, articulating 'primitive' totalising thinking in opposition to modern reification. He notes: the Aranta language, more archaic than any other...has as a characteristic to express only actions and states, but not objects, page 18.

In notebooks written in the final years of his life, Lévy-Bruhl (1975) expresses serious misgivings about his earlier ideas, especially his term "prelogical". As the preface, by Leenhardt, puts matters: Lévy-Bruhl takes up "his dialectic again without the intense concern for traditional logic...contradictions and incompatibilities which it contains, become...clear when...it is translated into a form. Juxtapositions which logic does not comprehend when they are presented in speech, here seem well ordered in the work of art...in the mind functions assert themselves which even the bonds of logic cannot constrain", pages xv and xviii. Lévy-Bruhl says that "For primitive men the fact that the ghost and the corpse are located in parts of space separated from each other does not prevent them from still constituting a duality-unity...Here is the essence of participation, of which

one of the characteristics is that the bi-presence is not an obstacle to what may be felt...it is felt, therefore it is real; objectively real", pages 4-5. He distinguishes between physical impossibility, which he equates with the *incompatibility* of propositions, so, for example, someone cannot be at place A and place B, a hundred miles away, simultaneously; and logical impossibility. Lévy-Bruhl says that there is nothing logically impossible about these propositions, they are merely logically contradictory. He points out that in contemporary Western thought the omnipresence of God, the virgin birth or the existence of miracles demonstrate the distinction between these two forms: physical impossibility, and logical contradiction which, although it wreaks havoc with Aristotle's laws, we all accept in certain instances.

Robin Horton's *Africa* article

This article, written by the philosopher of science Robin Horton (1967), is an important contribution to the theory of tribal thinking. By comparing tribal thought with contemporary scientific thinking, Horton exposes a number of misrepresentations of the former, and shows that these are partly caused by misunderstandings of the latter. However, he fails to trace the development from one type of society to the other, especially the secretive nature of science today and its links with ancient Mystery cults, which reveals a lack of understanding of social dynamics. Whilst Horton is not a conscious dialectical thinker, his work highlights some dialectical aspects of both tribal proto-science and contemporary science. For example: "The quest for explanatory theory is basically the quest for unity underlying apparent diversity; for simplicity underlying apparent complexity; for order underlying apparent disorder; for regularity underlying apparent anomaly", page 51. He reports on his research into tribal thought, which shows that "the gods of a given culture do form a scheme which interprets the vast diversity of everyday experience in terms of the actions of a relatively few *kinds* of forces...all the various oppositions and conflicts in Lugbara experience are interpreted as so many manifestations of the single underlying opposition between ancestors and *adro* spirits...Like atoms, molecules, and waves, then, the gods serve to introduce unity into diversity, simplicity into complexity, order into disorder, regularity into anomaly", page 52.

Horton uses the example of disease diagnosis to illustrate the process of abstraction, analysis and reintegration in tribal thought. The diviners present diagnoses which represent not only the limit of tribal technical knowledge of relevant diseases, but also seek knowledge from the patient

concerning his or her social relationships and look for wider social tensions as an equally important part of the diagnosis. The process of abstraction, an important aspect of dialectical thought, and the use of analogy are well developed in traditional thought. But only those aspects of the analogy which are relevant to the matter in hand are used: "The definition of a god may omit any reference to his physical appearance, his diet, his mode of lodging, his children, his relations with his wives, and so on. Asking questions about such attributes is as inappropriate as asking questions about the colour of a molecule or the temperature of an electron.", page 66.

In part two of Horton's article, some weaknesses are exposed: he assumes "that in traditional cultures there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets; whereas in scientifically oriented cultures, such an awareness is highly developed", page 155. This claim is only partially correct because all cultures to a degree contain their respective opposites. To suggest that any society is entirely static in either its practical or theoretical aspects is wrong, whilst to imply that modern science is *entirely* "open", as Horton does, is similarly, as Thomas Kuhn's work in the 1960s showed, mistaken. As a result of these one-sided views, Horton compounds his error when talking about reactions to, and explanations of, predictive failure in traditional and contemporary societies. Had he used examples of thinking on this matter in other societies, such as ancient and medieval ones, the fact that all societies contain a dialectical combination of open and closed aspects, freedom and necessity, in their theory and practice would have become clearer to him.. It is this combination, and the tensions to which it gives rise, which is the lifeblood of all societies.

Wittgenstein on Frazer's *Golden Bough*

Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically an English parson of our times with all his stupidity and feebleness, Wittgenstein (1991) page 5e.

..everything a man perceives year in, year out around him, connected together in any variety of ways - that all this should play a part in his thinking (his philosophy) and his practices, is obvious, or in other words this is what we really know and find interesting. How could fire or fire's resemblance to the sun have failed to make an impression on the awakening mind of man? But not 'because he can't explain it' (the stupid superstition of our time) - for does an 'explanation' make it less impressive?, page 6e.

Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages, for these savages will not be so far from any understanding of spiritual matters as an Englishman of the twentieth century. His explanations of the primitive observances are much cruder than the sense of the observances themselves, page 8e.

Wittgenstein (1991) is a collection of remarks, taken from his notebooks, on Frazer's ideas on earliest thought. He begins by making the Hegelian inspired point that "To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state it; we must find the *road* from error to truth...Frazer's account of the magical and religious notions of men is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as *mistakes*. Was Augustine mistaken, then, when he called on God on every page of the *Confessions*? Well - one might say - if he was not mistaken, then the Buddhist holy-man, or some other, whose religion expresses quite different notions, surely was. But *none* of them was making a mistake except where he was putting forward a theory", page 1e. Wittgenstein continues: "magic always rests on the idea of symbolism and of language...it expresses a wish...There is a mistake only if magic is presented as science", page 4e. He says that "it is precisely the characteristic feature of the awakening human spirit that a phenomenon has meaning for it. We could almost say, man is a ceremonial animal. This is partly false, partly nonsensical, but there is also something in it...men also carry out actions that bear a peculiar character and might be called ritualistic", page 7e.

Wittgenstein compares the 'primitive' totalising cosmology with contemporary reified thinking, which merely draws "attention to the similarity, the connection, between the *facts*. As one might illustrate the internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually transforming an ellipse into a circle, *but not in order to assert that a given ellipse in fact, historically, came from a circle* (hypothesis of development or evolution) but only to sharpen our eye for a formal connection", page 9e. Again in Hegelian fashion, Wittgenstein sublates Frazer's Eurocentrism when he says "What is true is that every view is significant for him who sees it so (but that does not mean 'sees it as something other than it is'). And in this sense every view is equally significant", page 11e.

Frazer presents an easy target for Wittgenstein; however, both fail to see the social essence mediated by the ceremonies and magic of 'primitive' people. This is clear when Wittgenstein,

like Horton, claims that "we can express the difference between science and magic if we say that in science there is progress, but not in magic. There is nothing in magic to show the direction of any development", page 13e.

Mainstream British Philosophy and Earliest Thought

British academic philosophy is currently dominated by intellectuals who subscribe to the analytical, or ordinary language, school. The work of Wittgenstein remains very influential to this school; however, whilst analytical philosophers display his weaknesses, they show few of his strengths. Typical of the analytical school is Mounce (1973), whose *Understanding a Primitive Society* emphasises the fixed dualities: rational-irrational, language-reality, true-false and scientific-non-scientific, whilst assuming that there is a universally acceptable distinction between the two. Despite his claims to the contrary, Mounce is unable to totalise 'primitive' thought by placing it in its wider social context and judging its 'rationality' from this perspective. Instead of realising that magic represents the sublimation of social relationships, especially the division between intellectual and manual labour, Mounce claims that much of 'primitive' magical thought and practice is outside the rational-irrational duality. Following Wittgenstein, he sees *only* the desire for wishes to be fulfilled and, in emphasising what he sees as the limits of tribal language, fails to see the insights made by Frazer, in particular that, in its own idiom, magical thinking is proto-science.

The Cult of the Shaman

The last few years have seen the development of an expanding market for books on, and other accessories connected with, Shamanism. Most of this material will no doubt follow the usual product life cycle, but a number of analytical texts exist, e.g. Cohen's (1991) *The Decadence of the Shamans*. Cohen begins by explaining the links between myths of a lost primordial paradise and human alienation, with reference to Marxist and Hegelian ideas on humanity's relationship with nature. However, Cohen reveals his romantic notion of the democratic role of the Shaman in "primitive communist society". He fails to see in the tribal intellectual division of labour, with its esoteric knowledge and initiation ceremonies, the beginning of a long process culminating in the chief-magician-priest in those tribes which adopted the early agricultural mode of production. This development is connected to the deep contradictions in hunter-gather societies, explained in the work of Marshall Sahlins. "The shaman has been supplanted by the priest - even if the old shamanic

practices may continue to a greater or lesser extent within the villages and among the unconquered tribal cultures.”, claims Cohen on page 11, revealing a lack of awareness of the complex and contradictory process of transition, explained by Sahlins.

Although he is correct when he points out the dialectical aspects of Freud's work, Cohen compounds his problems by using psycho-analysis to bolster his argument. He includes some interesting material on tribal concepts of time and the role of the unconscious, but his static distinction between materialism and idealism and his use of Freud to promote his view, mean that his argument in favour of the “grandeur of the Shamans”, with their “art of flying”, astral projection and telepathy, largely fails. The failure is caused partly by weaknesses in his theoretical approach, but also because his knowledge of the life and thought of the two earliest modes of production is scanty. This is demonstrated by his dialectical, but oversimplified, claim that “the unity of the primitive community was in this sense an oppressive, totalitarian unity...posited upon the division of mankind into a host of separate units, unconscious of, or even hostile to, each other. The unity of the tribe was predicated upon the disunity of the species, and the latter could not have been overcome without the dissolution of tribal boundaries and the emergence of class society.”, page 36. Whilst the argument is correct, it must be supplemented by a more detailed discussion of the tensions and resulting movement of earliest society. This is provided by Forde (1954) which emphasises stability within change in the life and thought of a number of African tribes, and most notably in Sahlins (1974).

Anthropology and *The Invention of Africa*

Mudimbe (1988) summarises the writing of some African anthropologists, who ask searching questions, including doubt regarding the possibility of an early African philosophy. He takes as his starting point the work of the white Belgian Jesuit Temples, whose study of Bantu philosophy generated much debate within the African academic community. Temples said that “We can conceive the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute, 'force', but the Bantu cannot. 'Force' in his thought is a necessary element in 'being', and the concept of 'force' is inseparable from the definition of 'being'. There is no idea among Bantu of 'being' divorced from the idea of 'force'”, quoted on page 138. Mudimbe himself says that “vital force appears to be the essential sign of ordering identities, differences, and relationships. From the extreme depth up to the

level of God, there is a permanent and dynamic dialectic of energy: vital force can be nourished, diminished, or stopped altogether", page 139.

He quotes the work of Kagame, who studied the metaphysics of Bantu philosophy: "The *existing* cannot be used as a synonym for *being there*, since in Bantu languages, the verb *to be* cannot signify *to exist*. The opposite of the existing is *nothing*. In analysing the cultural elements, one must conclude that the *nothing* exists and it is the entity which is at the basis of the *multiple*. One being is distinct from another, because there is *nothing* between them", page 147. Mudimbe summarises: "the *ntu* is somehow a sign of a universal similitude. Its presence in beings brings them to life and attests to both their individual value and to the measure of their integration in the dialectic of vital energy. *Ntu* is both a uniting and a differentiating vital norm which explains the powers of vital inequality in terms of difference between beings", page 148.

Concluding remarks on chapter one

Despite doubts concerning many of the anthropological sources, it is clear from the material presented in this chapter that dialectical thinking was a commonplace in earliest society. However, it is the case that the totalising dialectic form of 'primitives' is dominated by its inverted content, and is ultimately an alienated mode of thinking. The gods, spirits and occult forces of these hunter-gatherers and early agriculturalists are nothing other than inverted social forces. Earliest societies were engaged in a struggle against nature, and only the combined social forces of the tribe could resist this alien nature. Therefore the inverted anthropocentrism, which was such a feature of earliest culture, has to be understood as the intellectual counterpart of the genesis of the movement to humanise nature. The attempt to humanise nature is doomed within the limits of the technology available to a nomadic tribe, and this is the contradiction at the heart of hunter gatherer society. The gradual sublation of cyclical time is the reason for the development of social classes, which exist in potential in the division of labour in earliest tribal society, and represents the *movement*, rather than the resolution, of this contradiction. That this contradiction was expressed in both the form of theological scepticism, which has as its corollary a challenge to the priest caste, and as social tension, is clear from the following example of Maori thinking:

(God) himself made the good and the bad people. He is compassionate but he does not always know how to act justly for he gave us death. God acts unjustly for he made some people good and others bad. I and my companions work together in the fields; the crops of one prosper and those

of others fail. This proves that God is unjust and treats men unequally. God treats us, our children and our wives who perish, unkindly. If men behaved like that we say nothing, but when God acts thus it hurts us. From this we are right in inferring that God is unjust, quoted on page 378 of Radin (1927).

In the next two chapters I hope to demonstrate that the intellectuals of the class societies which developed in the ancient and classical world were profoundly influenced by the tribal dialectic. Their writings reveal the development of the concept of totalisation and the idea of the interpenetration of opposites. There was also development in the idea of contradiction, in particular the further articulation of the existence of contradictions both between nature and society, and, crucially, *within* society.

Chapter Two

The Ancient World

I am that which is, that which was, and that which will be; no one has lifted my veil, an inscription in the sanctuary of the Egyptian goddess Neith at Sais, quoted in Hegel (1952) page 257.

Good people do not go in for dialectics;

And dialecticians are not good people.

Real knowledge is not knowing everything;

And the know-alls have not got real knowledge.

From chapter 81 of the *Tao Te Ching*, quoted in Hughes (1942) page 164.

For a thing to be separated out (from the mass) is for it to become a thing. For it to become a (complete) thing is for it to de-become. Every single thing both becomes and de-becomes, both processes being to and fro in the unity of mutual interpenetration. Only the man of all-embracing intelligence knows this unity of mutual interpenetration.

Part of a work by Chuang Tzu, a Taoist influenced 'anarchist' poet, quoted on page 176 of Hughes.

Great men have their proper business, and little men have their proper business...Some labour with their minds, and some labour with their strength. Those who labour with their minds govern others; those who labour with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others support them; those who govern others are supported by them.

A quote from the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius, cited in Balazs (1964) page 17.

It was once the tradition that the first king of India was Manu Svayambhu (the Self-born Manu). Manu was born directly of the god Brahma, and was a hermaphrodite. From the female half of his body he bore two sons and three daughters, from whom descended a series of Manus.

Thapar (1966), page 28.

The transition from early agricultural society to the ancient mode of production: the urban revolution as the temporary resolution, or movement, of contradictions

There is no text in the English language which gives a comprehensive account of the history of the ancient world making substantial use of a dialectical perspective. Marx's writings on this topic are not well informed or developed, for the most part they are occasional remarks scattered around his larger works, particularly the third volume of *Capital* and *The German Ideology*, notes, such those referred to as the *Grundrisse*, articles and correspondence. In his introduction to Marx (1964) Hobsbawm mentions Marx's "brief, unsupported and unexplained list of the 'epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society' -namely, the 'Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois', of which the final one is the last 'antagonistic' form of the social process of production", page 11. Hobsbawm makes the point that Marx and Engels were "exceptionally well-read laymen" but in the mid to late 19th century had little translated literature and less archaeological and anthropological research available to them. Whilst their knowledge of India, Persia and China was comprehensive by the standards of the time, they knew little about Egypt, the rest of Africa and the Tigris-Euphrates basin.

Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* (1952), not to be confused with his *History of Philosophy* (1995), was a one of the few dialectical approaches to history available to Marx. However, this work shows Hegel at his worst; it is a perfect example of the kind of Hellenomania, Eurocentrism, and even blatant racism, such as the use of terms like "African stupidity" page 250. Although Hegel's text contains a number of useful observations, such as the Egyptian influences on Pythagorus and Plato and the dialectical basis of Zoroastrianism, it is marked by Eurocentric prejudice and crude generalisations about the Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese and Egyptian "character". Consequently most of its dialectical formulations seem artificial and empty, which demonstrate the point that dialectical logic expressed as a number of abstract formulations can never be a substitute for detailed knowledge of the matter in hand. It is likely that Hegel's book formed the basis of the ill-informed generalisations made by Marx in some of his writings on the ancient world. Yet, in contrast to Engels' unilinear scheme which formed the basis of the Marxist-Leninist historiography, Marx's writings show how dialectics can be used to articulate internal contradictions which bring about movement, development and transformation in the ancient mode of production

A text with a promising title is Hindess and Hirst's *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (1975), but it is written from the then fashionable structuralist perspective. The authors attack Hegel's "idealism" and "essentialism", rather than his lack of knowledge of the ancient world and his vulgar Eurocentrism. The authors try to produce an antiseptic 'Marxism' purged of Hegelian dialectics. What is valuable in the text is taken from Marx's writings, but they make little effort to familiarise themselves with twentieth century scholarship on their subject and therefore present a one-sided 19th century view of pre-capitalist societies which emphasises their static aspects. Because of their rejection of dialectics and lack of relevant scholarship, they are unaware of most of the social struggles, and the corresponding dialectical thinking of the participants, which took place in the societies considered in this chapter. They are unable to understand the tensions behind the static appearances during certain periods of the history of these societies and the resultant storing up of contradictions, which, when eventually manifested, come as a surprise to these authors.

One popular text on ancient history which stresses class struggle and the way that contradictions "in due course compelled the emergence of new productive forces and a new cycle of social evolution", page 8, is *What Happened in History*, Childe (1964). This work makes the point that the apparent resolution of contradictions which occurs as a result of the transformation of a given society, often only suppresses, or moves, them, so they may manifest themselves in a new, more intense way. Clark's forward to this edition makes the point that Childe was

profoundly impressed by the limitations imposed on societies at the level of savagery by the low density of population and uncertainty of food-supply normally associated with reliance on hunting and gathering...Neolithic barbarism in turn he saw to have been handicapped by a surplus too small to withstand natural disaster and by a self-sufficiency which meant that expansion could only be achieved by enlarging the area of settlement, a solution inherently wasteful since it could only be achieved in the end through conflict. This is why he stressed the importance of achieving a surplus which was reliable and large enough to support urban life and the employment of specialists like metal-workers, priests, and rulers, an achievement which for him constituted a veritable Urban Revolution. But the urban civilisations of Egypt, Sumer, and the Indus Valley were no more immune from the effects of inborn contradictions than the neolithic peasantries had been: to mention only two, the concentration of purchasing power in comparatively few hands prevented an adequate expansion of the market, and

divorce between craftsmen and literate members of society constituted an effective drag on technical advance., pages 8-9. Apart from the comments on hunter gatherers, this is a good summary of the genesis of the urban revolution.

A key term in the discussion of the long process leading to the urban revolution is *social surplus*. So, for example, Childe, writing about the transformation of riverside villages into cities in the Nile, Indus and Tigris-Euphrates valleys, says farmers produced: “a surplus of foodstuffs over and above their domestic requirements, and by concentrating this surplus used it to support a new *urban* population of specialized craftsmen, merchants, priests, officials, and clerks...The social surplus, derived primarily from subsistence agriculture by irrigation, was concentrated in the hands of a relatively narrow circle of priests and officials, whose limited expenditure limited also the growth of the urban industrial and commercial population...In the *Classical* or *Greco-Roman* economy...the surplus, now partly derived from specialized farming, was more widely distributed among an upper middle class of merchants, financiers, and capitalist farmers. This permitted a notable growth of population, at least in the Mediterranean basin, which was, however, ultimately checked by the relative impoverishment or actual enslavement of the primary producers and artisans.”, pages 30-31. There has been considerable discussion of the concept of surplus in the transition from agricultural to urban society. This debate hinges on the meaning of surplus, in particular what kind of ‘thing’ or ‘entity’ it is. Dialectical thinking emphasizes that a surplus, as the above quote makes clear, can only be understood as a *relationship*. Sometimes the true relationship is transparent, or it may contain a contradictory essence behind the surface appearance of use-values produced by workers in proto-capitalist social relations.

We saw in the previous chapter that slash and burn agriculture developed in various parts of the world as a temporary solution to the stunting contradictions of the hunter-gather mode of production. Agricultural nomadism, caused in part by the erosion of the productivity of the soil on a given plot of land, similarly stunts the growth of the population and holds back the development of technical knowledge and culture. Therefore, various techniques for restoring the yield of the soil developed, such as the grazing of animals and the use of their droppings as fertilisers, which in turn caused fixed site villages with granaries and warehouses to emerge. Childe points out that these villages were initially largely, though never completely, self-sufficient. However, as populations grew and new needs developed, intercourse with other

societies in the form of trade by barter developed, along with a division of labour which was radically different from that in hunter-gather society. In order to feed, clothe and shelter the growing populations of these villages, new land was brought into cultivation and pasture, but this led to new contradictions because acquisition of land was at the expense of the remaining hunter gatherers or of other villages. These contradictions explain the growth in the production of weapons which archaeological research reveals in the later neolithic period, and the incidence of "conquest, expulsion, or enslavement of one people by another...the result may be a 'mixed culture' (which) may denote stratified societies divided into rulers and ruled...they probably symbolize the incipient break-up of the clan and 'kinship' organization of society", Childe, pages 74-5.

Childe goes on to show how one of the key contradictions of hunter gather societies, the vulnerability to natural disaster, is only partially resolved in the development of the neolithic village. It was the development of city states in the fourth millenium B.C. which made possible the amassing of a surplus of use-values. The development of appropriate technical knowledge, following the increased division between mental and manual labour, offset some of the worse excesses of nature. One of the key technological developments of this period was the alloy of copper and tin known as bronze, and the development of metallurgy as a separate occult craft or "mystery". It not only added to the growing division of labour, but also to the rise of both itinerant smiths and mining away from the fertile valleys in response to the growing demand for all manner of metal use-values. To the extent that peasants, warriors and others used metal, it had to be obtained by barter for an ever greater surplus of subsistence goods, thereby intensifying the tensions of the self-sufficient village economy. The development of specialist carpenters, potters and people with other craft skills had both positive and negative effects on village life. Despite the benefits to the quality of life which resulted, the negative side was that most of these skills were monopolised by men, which profoundly affected the economic and social relationships between the sexes and set off a process culminating in the debasement of women in the classical world. Similarly the use of the wooden plough during this period, which came to contain more metal inputs, revolutionized agriculture, transforming it from being a largely female activity, based on the hoeing of plots, to a largely male one in fields.

The urban revolution seems to have begun with a combination of factors coming together in certain large villages to create the qualitative change to the first city states in the Nile valley, Indus and Tigris-Euphrates basin. The factors which caused this process, which can be articulated dialectically as the transformation from quantity to quality, included a relatively large population formed partly by military conquest and supported by a high yield agricultural system controlled by a ruling class through a proto-state. The state, once developed, was composed of a tribal chief-monarch supported by ministers, court advisers and administrators, and a priest class with knowledge of a number of intellectual disciplines such as architecture and astronomy. The state structure survived changes in the dynasties caused by revolution or invasion, due to a stable bureaucracy, a well organised and well equipped military, police force and courts. There was considerable division of craft labour, a workforce composed of slaves, peasants and others able to perform *corvée*, or state imposed, labour. A growing merchant class, able to import a range of use-values, revolutionised the Mesopotamian city states after Sargon's reign by its conversion of the general surplus product into *profit*, *rent* and *interest*, measured in barley or precious metal. It seems from the excavation of the third millennium Indus cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa that craftsmen were producing for the market, rather than the monopoly state, as was the case early in the development of the Egyptian and Sumerian cities, whilst a wealthy merchant middle class promoted imports and exports.

Access to strategic raw materials was obviously necessary for a city state to prosper, and the famous *Epic of Gilgamesh* (1960) reveals the crucial contradiction that wood, cedar in particular, was necessary, but not available to, the early city states such as Uruk. This contradiction inspires the key theme of the *Epic* which is the mythical journey, presumably a sublimated military expedition to the forests of ancient Lebanon, that was typical of the time. The historical records show similar expeditions to Nubia, Syria and elsewhere by the ancient Egyptians in search of strategic raw materials such as wood, metals and stone.

Archaeological records show that the city states' search for raw materials inevitably led to the further contradiction that diminishing returns set in as the various city states competed with each other. It was partially resolved firstly by war and the qualitative change to a single, or nation, state composed of a number of cities, and secondly by the establishment of colonies and spheres of influence in order to plunder, extract tribute and engage in other forms of 'trade'. However, the class structure of these societies generated other contradictions, such as

the concentration of the bulk of the surplus produced by the masses in the hands of the ruling class. Whilst this surplus made possible vast public works schemes, such as the building of city walls, temples and pyramids, it restricted the development of other social classes. Childe gives examples of lack of access to the surplus holding back the development of proto-industry and craft production, partly through insufficient research and development and also through deficient effective demand for the products of artisans. As ancient urban society developed out of tribal village life, there followed the most intense social struggles. These included the antagonistic class relationships centered around the distribution of the surplus product, struggles over access to fertile land, raw materials and slaves; simultaneously there emerged markets and redivision of labour. There were also struggles between different imperial powers, between city states, individual monarchs and their priests or administrators. As hunter gatherers and early agricultural societies were overrun, the number of slaves, servants and other landless peoples grew, and men and women of all social classes struggled against each other as patriarchy developed. Childe notes that the routine exploitation of the masses, through taxes and other charges, was compounded by arbitrary abuses by priests and administrators, so that a Sumerian decree spoke of "restoring the old order" and establishing "a power apparently standing above society, necessary to moderate the conflict of classes and keep it within the bounds of order", Childe (1964), pages 107-8.

Childe charts the rise of the middle classes in the ancient city states, noting the example of the booty, including slaves, brought back by the Akkadian kings and shared by the soldiers. This developed purchasing power and stimulated the market for goods, land and slaves, which in turn increased the numbers of artisans and merchants. As metal currency developed, from about 800BC in Assyria and Syria, and money-lending spread, so did the number of insolvent debtors who became slaves, thus reducing the wages of free labourers. Kings fixed maximum prices, to restrict the power of the merchants, and maximum wages in order to reduce the costs of *corvée* labour. Childe also mentions the profound effect of technological developments, such as bronze weapons, chariots and tools, which changed the balance of power in favour of those who possessed them. The iron age also revolutionised the production and ownership of tools and weapons, in that they became far cheaper than those made from bronze. City states began to spring up from Spain in the west as far as China in the east. Anyang was established as the capital of the Shang dynasty around 1400BC, typically its

divine monarch appropriated the surplus product of the peasants in order to support the court, military, and employ artisans and others.

The *Black Athena* debate

Volume one of *Black Athena*, Bernal (1991), caused a controversy because it challenged the beliefs held by the majority of classical scholars, and a wider lay public, about ancient Greece and its relationship with the rest of the ancient world. Most classicists believe that the Greeks more or less invented science, mathematics, philosophy, democracy, literature, architecture and art, thereby making European civilisation possible. Closely connected to this belief is the view that the 'Aryan' people of Europe are intellectually superior to all others. In contrast Bernal and others claim that Greek learning represents a continuation of ideas and techniques developed in ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Sumeria, India, and elsewhere. Most classicists chose to ignore Bernal's challenge, but the collection of papers published in *Black Athena Revisited*, Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996), represents a classicist response. Bernal's offer of a contribution to this book of papers was refused by the editors, and the result is a pedestrian text which mainly focuses on denying the blackness of the ancient Egyptians.

It is only in the post-1945 period that scholars began to challenge the various colonialist assumptions of the Helenocentric model of ancient history. The work of a number of African and African-American scholars, such as C.A. Diop (1991), T. Obenga (1989 and 1992) and George James (1992), concentrated on the various contributions to knowledge and civilisation of the ancient Egyptians. They exposed the implicit, and in some cases explicit, attempt of classicists to hide years of ridicule, exploitation, enslavement and genocide of black people. Their work is important and positive because it exposes the key contribution of black Africans to Greek thought and knowledge, and thereby promotes self-respect for many millions of black people, most of whom continue to live wretched lives either as dispossessed peasants or ghettoised proletarians.

However, it is necessary to place the development of the ideas of these black writers, and Bernal, into their social context. They are part of the tendency within capitalist social relations, as in earlier modes of production, for the division of mental and manual labour to promote the formation of a relatively privileged intelligentsia. Political correctness and the politics of

identity, of which Afrocentrism is a part, must be understood as contradictory developments linked to social phenomena such as the 'collapse of communism', attacks on Marxist academics and the current weakness of the western working class. The intellectuals who subscribe to identity politics claim to speak on behalf of all women, black people, gays and the disabled respectively, irrespective of social class. In doing so they omit to point out that these natural differences are always socially mediated. To abstract these natural differences from their place in the totality of capitalist social relations is to present a one-sided view, a view which will be inadequate to the task of fundamental social transformation. Because it marginalises social class, and avoids a direct assault on market social relations, the identity politics movement does not normally have difficulty with career advancement. However, there are exceptions, such as the Afrocentrist Leonard Jeffries whose challenges to American classicists led to him being dismissed from his academic post.

With the partial exception of Diop, the negative side of the Afrocentrics' argument is that in their zeal to point out that ancient Egypt was predominantly black and highly influential on Greek thought and knowledge, they project their lack of interest in contemporary class struggle onto their historical perspective. They conservatively present Egypt as a benevolent static hierarchy, by and large ignoring its class relations marked by struggle and change. This leads to a failure to see how class relations interpenetrated with three thousand years of alternate colonial expansion and of occasional outside occupation of pre-Roman Egypt. As a result the Afrocentric writers, and Bernal, share with their classical opponents the inability to link these social struggles to the contributions to philosophy, and dialectical thought in particular, made by the ancient Egyptians, Indians and others.

The political economy of pharaonic Egypt

Kmt, the black land or land of the black people, is known by us as Egypt, the name given to it by the ancient Greeks. Egyptian culture, according to Obenga (1989), is closely linked to that of a number of African tribes, such as the Dogon from West Africa and the Bantu of Southern Africa, whilst other writers suggest links with the !Kung. Egypt was formed from the struggle between clans, tribes and peoples, with their chiefs, priesthoods and deities represented by their animal totems: "the victory of a clan confirmed the power of its god and increased his prestige", Sauneron (1960) pages 171-2. The Pharaonic dynasties were modeled on the earlier

Nubian Ta-Seti dynasty of about 3,400 BC. Upper and lower Egypt were united by Menes to form a single state far wealthier than the individual Sumerian city-states. Their respective deities were absorbed, and those of the court and the powerful priesthoods at Thebes, Memphis and Heliopolis became nationally known and formed into the Ennead, or divine council of nine deities.

In keeping with the totalising tribal beliefs examined in the previous chapter, kings, and some viziers, like Imhotep, were deified. Egyptian mythology is full of examples of metamorphoses between humans, animals, gods and inanimate objects or forces. There is evidence of extensive use of the tribal magical techniques described in the last chapter. The renowned Egyptian medical techniques, pioneered by Imhotep, were a synthesis of defensive magic with anatomical and biological knowledge. The Egyptians attached great importance to the magical power available to someone who knows the esoteric name or word, what the Greeks called *logos*, for an entity. This is a major theme in texts written in hieroglyphics, literally 'sacred words' which they believed could not be translated into any other language: "Never did the Egyptians consider the language - that corresponding to the hieroglyphics - as a *social* instrument; it always remained for them the sonorous echo of the basic energy which sustains the universe, a *cosmic force*. Thus the study of this language gave them an 'explanation' of the world.", Sauneron page 127. The use of hieroglyphics became dialectical and totalising, because "the spelling of a divine name would henceforth create around this name an *aura* of secondary ideas, a whole series of descriptive adjectives which could be applied, in the context, to this divinity...a definition of the world which was at the same time visual and symbolic: the universe, its laws and its history, were born from the pronunciation of the divine words: a part of this secret force, of this all-powerful primeval energy, remained enclosed in the secret of their hieroglyphs", pages 133-4.

The evidence contained in Bierbrier (1989), although interpreted in a positivistic way, contains useful information on the class structure of ancient Egypt. The research is based on the excavation of a site now called Deir el-Medina near Luxor. This site was typical of those which housed the workers who built the Pharaonic pyramid tombs from about 1880 BC, although step pyramids were first built at the beginning of the Third Dynasty, about 2660 BC. The mass of evidence shows that ancient Egypt in this period was a class society with a highly developed division of labour. For example the high-priests were supported by a mass of lesser

priests and auxiliary temple staff, organized on the basis of a division of labour unprecedented in the ancient world. The ruling class composed the royal family, whose head was known as the Pharaoh in later times, the military, priesthood, and a large number of local and national administrators. The state, which levied taxes and rents on the rest of the population, is thought to have acquired its power by organizing the labour of the masses in order to utilise the flood water of the Nile for agricultural and other purposes through the development of irrigation techniques. Land was owned either by the state or leading members of the ruling class. The land was worked by a peasant class, who, as in European feudal society, were required to work for the state for a number of days per year, known as *corvée* labour. Peasant labour was conscripted by the state for other purposes during the flooding of the Nile, when agriculture stopped. However, members of other social groups were able to avoid their *corvée* by providing substitutes or making appropriate payments to state officials. Those from lower social classes who ran away from the *corvée* were either imprisoned or became hereditary servants, a position half-way between the free peasants and slaves.

There gradually developed a class in which male breadwinners learned craft skills from their fathers and rented them to the state under the supervision of foremen and scribes in return for wages. Note that wages, as was the case with all income, were paid in kind as the monetary system was not well developed until about 700 BC. According to Childe (1964) barley was the means of payment and unit of account in Sumeria; metals were used but they were weighed and not minted into coins. The wages of the state employed tomb builders supported a relatively good standard of living, and workers from parts of the vast Egyptian empire applied for these jobs. Some tomb workers were even able to club together to buy slaves. Although there were slaves in ancient Egypt, their legal and economic status was so much better than that in other parts of the ancient and classical world that some commentators do not consider them to be slaves at all. Most slaves, including the Hebrews, Nubians and Asiatics, had been war captives, brought into the country and sold by merchants. They were mainly female and used as domestic servants, or agricultural labourers for the few males, and owned their own small homes and had families. Slaves had rights, could sometimes obtain their freedom and occasionally married into the families of their former owners, although they had to provide *corvée* labour in excess of that required by citizens such as free servants and peasant labourers.

Women in ancient Egypt lived much better lives than those in any other society in the ancient or classical world. Their legal rights, especially in the area of property and divorce, were comparable with those of women in contemporary capitalist society. They often obtained high positions in the ruling class, including high priestess and even Pharaoh, Queen Hatshepsut usurped the throne and ruled from about 1479 to 1458 BC. The gender-based division of labour inherited from tribal society meant that most women tended to work in the home, although women of higher social classes had slaves, but child care was onerous, because families were frequently large, with up to fifteen children. Nye (1990) gives an extract from a hieroglyphic text in the prologue to her book, though surprisingly she makes no comment on the text. The goddess Isis is trying to discover the true name of the god Ra and thereby gain his power for herself. The myth is derived from tribal thought, it uses magic and links gods and humans in a totalising way, and its central concern is with the struggle for power. It is possible that this struggle between men and women in the highest social class of ancient Egypt corresponded to the transition from tribal society, in which women retain a good deal of power because of their functions in the division of labour, to the ancient mode of production which redefines the division of labour to the disadvantage of women.

Most writers, including those adopting an Afrocentric perspective, present a static idealised view of life in ancient Egypt. However, Bierbrier shows evidence for routine bribery and corruption of state officials, and the existence of police forces, courts, debt-collectors and bailiffs tell their own story. Quite apart from colonial wars and civil wars between contending Pharaohs, there is a good deal of evidence of class struggle. Angela Thomas' (1988) *Akhenaten's Egypt* documents this period, circa 1352 to 1336 BC, in which the Pharaoh formed a new religion in order to combat the power of the Theban priesthood:

Unlike his predecessors Akhenaten extended his policy to an attack against the cult of Amun and to a certain extent against the cults of other gods. Their names were erased in temples and their worship suppressed. How widespread this suppression was is difficult to judge but it would have struck mainly at the officials and priesthoods of the gods concerned. Such a step gave the king immense political power. In more practical terms there were also economic advantages. If temples were closed and their priesthoods disbanded, the estates and income of those cults could be repossessed by the crown. Akhenaten needed more revenue in order to build his city and provide lavish offering for the new temples to Aten. The property which he acquired by these means was administered by his own officials and not, as before, by local

ones. Government, therefore, became more centralised and the officials and priests, all educated men, who were adversely affected by the changes, could not do other than accept them, pages 22-23.

Thomas discusses the background to this development as one in which Egypt had colonised Nubia to the South and Palestine and Syria to the north east, but were constantly worried by military threats from the Near East, especially the Mitanni, Hittites and Assyrians. Bierbrier mentions strikes by workers, such as one during the reign of Ramesses III, circa 1158 BC, when workers went on strike and engaged in sit-down demonstrations due to unpaid wages: “It is because of hunger and because of thirst that we came here. There is no clothing, no ointment, no fish, no vegetables. Send to Pharaoh our good Lord about it and send to the vizier our superior, that sustenance may be made for us.”, Bierbrier page 41. Stead (1986) quotes from texts which reveal the class relationship between the scribes and craftsmen, stressing the high status and standard of living of the former, and their contempt for manual labour. He also claims that peasants who failed to pay their rents and taxes were ordered to be beaten by local officials.

In the *General Theory* Keynes (1973) makes a number of comments on the economic implications of the Egyptian state’s decision to organize massive public works schemes, most notably the building of pyramids and the search for precious metals “the fruits of which, since they could not serve the needs of man by being consumed, did not stale with abundance”, page 131. Keynes’ confusion concerning the social relations of ancient Egypt, which caused his failure to recognise that gold was exchanged for imports, is compounded when he implicitly compares this mode of production, which he links with feudalism, with the lack of effective demand in 1930s British capitalist society:

In so far as millionaires find their satisfaction in building mighty mansions to contain their bodies when alive and pyramids to shelter them after death, or, repenting of their sins, erect cathedrals and endow monasteries or foreign missions, the day when abundance of capital will interfere with abundance of output may be postponed. ‘To dig holes in the ground’, paid for out of savings, will increase, not only employment, but the real national dividend of useful goods and services. It is not reasonable, however, that a sensible community should be content to remain dependent on such fortuitous and often wasteful mitigations when once we understand the influences upon which effective demand depends., page 220.

Keynes' remarks demonstrate his understanding of the workings of the capitalist mode of production from the vantage point of the crisis-bound British capitalist class mediated by the paternalistic Cambridge intelligentsia. He sees the profound contradiction that a multiplier effect *may* be set in motion by the destruction, and subsequent replacement, of a part of the stock of means of production which are still in good condition. Although this would be ruinous for the individual owners, to the extent that it, or any 'wasteful' activity sponsored by the state, caused profitable production, it would benefit capital as a whole. However, Keynes' remarks reveal his inability to negate a neo-classical theorisation, which ignores social class and sees only atomised individuals, and look behind the veil of the surface phenomena of 1930s capitalism in crisis. This prevents him from realising that the problems of overproduction, underconsumption, lack of foreign trade, falling prices, wage cutting and mass unemployment, are all manifestations of the antagonistic relationship between the productive forces and social relations of capitalist society. For our present discussion, it is important to note that Keynes also lacks sufficient knowledge of ancient social relations, and is therefore unable to compare the ancient and capitalist modes of production.

During the pyramid-age labour was not performed in return for money wages, it was a means to creating a surplus product which was appropriated by the ruling class in the form of use values. Keynes fails to see that different contradictions follow from the specific content of the surplus product, in particular that a money based economy is subject to a more intense cycle of boom and slump than a predominantly barter economy. The fact that the Pharaohs, priests and others extract a surplus suggests proto-capitalism, but does not mean that a given use-value is 'wasteful' or 'productive', as judged by the logic of capitalism. These major "public works" schemes have to be examined in the context of the antagonistic social, and colonial, relations which apply at different periods in Egyptian history. Childe is influenced by Keynes when he mentions the contradiction that: "the economy of the Early Bronze Age cities could not expand internally owing to the over-concentration of purchasing power...the urban economy must - and did - expand externally", page 147. However, although he acknowledges elsewhere that the ruling class can increase both the size of the labour force and its productivity, thereby expanding the surplus product, Childe is too dogmatic about the possible reasons for Egypt's decline. He claims that:

In the event the bounds of these activities were reached with the pyramids of the fourth Dynasty Pharaohs. Not even the fabulous reserves of fertile Egypt could support indefinitely such unproductive expenditure. The economic system began to shrink. The nobles' great estates became increasingly self-contained 'households', a relapse towards neolithic self-sufficiency, page 132.

There may be other reasons why pyramid building ceased. Recent archaeological research at the temple at Karnak suggests that the economic and military decline which set in at the end of the New Kingdom, 1,500-1,000BC, was caused by the priests amassing much of the tribute from the empire, as well as up to a third of all the land of the country. This profoundly weakened the military capacity of the Pharaoh, so that a series of foreign invasions of Egypt followed.

The social struggles and dialectical thought of the Egyptian priest class

At the height of Egypt's imperial power in the New Kingdom, the magnificent temple at Karnak, which employed 80,000 people at its zenith, was gradually constructed as a monument to the esoteric religious beliefs of the priests. At the focal point of their religion was a dialectic between order and chaos, which suggests a sublimation of the relationship between social order and disorder. The sun god, Amun, had to be worshipped because, like the waters of the Nile, its constant renewal was the means by which the world retained its natural and social order, called *Maat*. Amun had to be pleased because he was the reason that the world avoided the descent into the primal chaos, or *Noun*. The priest class were the spiritual basis of the imperial claim to bring *Maat* to the *Noun* of the barbarian world.

As Sauneron (1960) points out, the priest class, which included women, normally inherited its knowledge and privileges from tribal times, though positions could be bought from, or issued by, the Pharaoh. The priests monopolised the temples, from which the masses of the population were excluded. Whilst the priest-class as a whole maintained their monopoly of Mystery cult knowledge of religion, magic, philosophy, mathematics, astrology, alchemy and the natural sciences, some of its members were ignorant of these subjects and maintained their privileges by corruption and intrigue. Although its highest ranks were part-time, often for three months a year, and new appointments were made by the sovereign from the highest

strata of the ruling class, the most powerful priesthoods maintained their hereditary privileges over many generations and often contended with the royal court for state power: "There were periods in the New Kingdom, when the clergy of Amon was richer and more powerful than the king himself...The religious history of Egypt is thus marked, in every period, by an official double attitude of the kings, apparently contradictory: considering the dynastic god as the all-powerful ally who assures his own glory, and who has the right to the most sumptuous attentions; but, at the same time, watching with a distrustful eye the scope of the clergies whose appetite and needs never ceased to grow - always beyond the favors conceded them", Sauneron page 173.

According to Bierbrier, a surprisingly high proportion of the population of ancient Egypt was able to read and write the demotic, and sometimes the hieratic, although not the hieroglyphic, text. Therefore the priests could not maintain their privileges because of their monopoly of literacy per se, as was the case in medieval Europe. However, they did have a near monopoly of the hieroglyphic script which they used for their esoteric knowledge. Of the literature that survives, the most numerous is the so-called wisdom literature which consists of ethics, religion and philosophical themes. It is a genre which was said to have begun with the vizier-priest Imhotep, circa 2650 BC, and later priest-sages such as Hordjedef and Heferti who were renowned throughout the ancient world. Although much of the writing which survives, such as *The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood*, consists of static oppositions and vulgar moralising, some shows evidence of dialectical thinking and contains esoteric knowledge developed by the priests and is the culmination of the African tribal Mystery cults

One totalising aspect of priestly thinking was the concept of *Maat*, which is similar to the Chinese *Tao* and comes from the tribal dialectic between the One and the many, which guides both natural and social processes. The Pharaoh is charged by God with guaranteeing the natural, political and ethical order, rather like the chief in tribal society, but in practice all but its overtly political aspects are delegated to the specialists, functionaries, scientists and technicians: the high priests. *Maat*, along with some other totalising concepts, became a conservative world view, in keeping with a priesthood which accepts its privileged status in a hierarchical society normally dominated by the Pharaoh. However, the detailed working of *Maat*, and other aspects of priestly thought, is more contradictory, such as the tendency to

return to primal chaos, the Noun, and the rise and fall of the various gods, which is more in keeping with a class engaged in a struggle for wealth and power.

A number of European scholars have joined Afrocentric writers like Diop (1991) and Obenga (1989 and 1992) to defy the classics establishment, by examining the Egyptian priest class and stressing its philosophical achievements, including its dialectical thinking. The work of R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz was based on fifteen years studying the art and architecture of the Temple of Luxor. His short text (1978) *Symbol and the Symbolic*, concentrates on the thinking of the Pharaonic priest class as recorded in their writing and art. Their thought, which the author argues loses much when translated from hieroglyphics into our analytically based language, displays what he calls analogical thinking, which seeks to integrate the subject with the object of thought. By use of this esoteric method the priests discerned hidden connections, or essences, behind the exoteric appearances. The greatest priest philosopher of the Pharaonic period was Imhotep, on whom the Greeks based Asklepios, whilst Hermes Trismegistus was the Greek name for the Egyptian god Thoth. In the Hermetic texts, to be considered in Chapter Four, Trismegistus tells his pupil, the initiate Asklepios, that people “are deceived when they suffer themselves to be drawn after the image of things, without seeking for the true reason of them”, Schwaller page 12, which is a good example of the essence-appearance duality, which was crucial to Marx’s economic writings.

Schwaller points out that according to the hieratic philosophy nature is subject to hidden positive and negative forces, which are depicted in artistic and written form in myth. One example is the antagonism between Seth of the south and Horus of the north, negative and positive forces respectively. The interpenetration between these forces accounts not only for the terrestrial magnetic poles but also for the dynamic of cause and effect. Seth’s negativity is based on the tendency to return to primeval chaos, also a major theme in tribal thought, that helps to explain why nature is unstable, resulting, for example, either in overflowing or underflooding of the Nile. To demonstrate this point Schwaller uses the example of light and shadow; without either aspect we would be overwhelmed by the other and unable to see anything. The reality of change or movement, which cannot be adequately expressed conceptually, is a major theme in Pharaonic thought. The benu-bird, or phoenix, being reborn from its own ashes, and the artistic depiction of birds in flight are attempts to conceptualise movement. The priests’ conceptualisation of time attempts to show its essence not in empty

abstractions, hypostatized in fractions of seconds or instants, as in the paradoxes of the the Greek philosopher Zeno, but as real movement. This is said by Schwaller to be the hidden meaning of the two Aker lions called respectively 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow', shown on his page 52. The key theme of Schwaller's book is that priestly symbolism attempts to capture the essence of the phenomena which elude static modes of thought. He gives the example of the symbol π , which attempts to capture the essence of a circle in a way that no numbers can. In a footnote a similar point is made about the contradictory essence of $\sqrt{-1}$, which is simultaneously +1 and -1. Most Egyptian priesthoods believed in a godhead, shown in the depiction of a human with the two heads of Horus and Seth, which is a dialectical interplay between what we would call monotheism and polytheism, that defies Aristotelian logic with its law of non-contradiction.

Lamy (1981), Schwaller's daughter in law, continued the tradition of research into the dialectical aspects of the thought of ancient Egypt. She noted the explanation of the creation contained in the Pyramid Texts in vertical columns of hieroglyphics which was accepted by the priesthoods at Heliopolis, Memphis, Hermopolis and Thebes: "Before there was any opposition, any yes and no, positive and negative; before there was any complementarity, high and low, light and shadow; before there was presence or absence, life or death, heaven or earth: there was but one incomprehensible Power, alone, unique, inherent in the Nun, the indefinable cosmic sea, the infinite source of the Universe, outside of any notion of Space and Time.", page 8. Summing up the sacred wisdom Lamy says:

the theology seems continually to challenge our rational logic, often presenting side by side two notions which seem difficult to reconcile, if not contradictory ...the ancient Egyptian mind nearly always envisages a notion together with its inverse, which is indissociable from it. For example, dilation is inconceivable without contraction; likewise every concrete object necessarily has two sides. This leads to the notion of reciprocity, in which an activity in one direction implies an activity in the other. ... A third characteristic of the Pharaonic mentality is an appreciation of simultaneity. This is expressed in various ritual representations - encountered chiefly in the temples - by the superimposition in a single image of several points of view and moments of time. The falcon hovering over the king is a typical example: its head is in profile; one of its wings is represented as seen from above; the other wing and the tail are seen from below. What at first seems to be a frozen moment of flight thus actually represents several moments of flight seen

together. Another example is provided by the calendrical system of the ancient Egyptians. This system is comparable to no other, for it is neither exclusively stellar nor solar nor lunar nor seasonal, but incorporates all these cycles in a simultaneity which seems inconceivable to us.,page 18.

Lamy discusses the secret scientific principles encoded in the mythology of the Egyptians. She gives the example of the depiction of a thunderbolt by two parallel arrows going in opposite directions, and the life force, or becoming, generated by the One becoming Two, which is the generative power of much of nature. Lamy quotes the following lines from an Egyptian coffin inscription on page 9:

I am One that transforms into Two

I am Two that transforms into Four

I am Four that transforms into Eight

After this I am One.

Kheper in ancient Egyptian, which can be translated as constant and ceaseless Becoming, is an important principle in dialectics, stressing the idea of being, or what is, as movement or flux, the One becoming Many. The Pyramid Text begins:

(when) I became, the becoming became, I have become in becoming (the form) of Khepri who came into being on the First Time...when I became, the transformations became, all the metamorphoses coming to pass after I had become., quoted in Lamy page 14.

Dialectics in ancient China

Balazs' (1964) text, which stressed the "intimate relation between social and intellectual history" page xviii, argued out that, after the unification of China in 221BC, the state became dominated by a tiny scholar-official class, the mandarins. The large land ownership of this class only partly explains its power relative to the merchants and artisans, since its administrative, coordinating and supervising functions were also important. The author prefers the term "class" to "caste" to describe this "literati", because unlike castes which are closed it allowed a limited amount of entry to its ranks based on literary examinations. Speculating about the longevity of its dominance, which lasted until the 20th century, Balazs was both impressed by its achievements and repelled by

its tyrannies. He notes Hegel's view of China's permanence, but goes beyond it by pointing out the permanence within change of the mandarins when he says:

The first thing that strikes one about this social stratum is the precarious position of its members individually, contrasted with their continuous existence as a social class. Even the highest officials were, as individuals, at the mercy of the absolute despotic state, and were liable to disappear suddenly from view. Any one of them might be minister one day, and consigned to a dungeon the next; yet within the same state that had condemned him as an individual, the body of officials as a whole continued, undisturbed, to play its part, page 6.

The mandarins dominated intellectual labour in China and eventually synthesized the static Confucian natural and legal philosophy with other philosophies. Their outlook was reminiscent of medieval scholasticism, but it was atheistic and tried to purge any mystical tendencies which were seen as "a cloak for subversive tendencies", page 18. Confucianism insisted on *hsiao*, obedience, to one's elders and betters, which justified the suppression of firstly the peasant masses and secondly the rising bourgeoisie in their attempts to employ wage labour and thus sow the seeds of capitalism. Their philosophy began as the world view of the *Ju*, a group of revolutionary diviners, teachers and intellectuals who serviced the land owning class; not surprisingly its metamorphosis into the ideology of the mandarins led to contradictions. The Confucian view speaks of a struggle for democracy for "the people", but it was restricted to the ranks of the aristocracy or "hundred families". Another contradiction concerned the Confucian belief that the family should have priority over the state, which in practice sanctioned personal aggrandisement in the form of bribery and other corrupt practices, which were the norm amongst the mandarins. As all written work had to be approved by the scholar-officials, few if any dialectical texts became available after 221BC, although from the sixth to the tenth century Buddhism, which arrived from India, challenged Confucian orthodoxy. Our study of Chinese dialectical thinking concentrates upon the earlier, turbulent period.

Whereas Menes united ancient Egypt in 3200BC, ancient China did not become a unified state for almost another three thousand years. During this period China went through a long period of transition from early agriculture to local kingdoms. Maoist ideology speaks of the transition from slavery to feudalism as part of a unilinear scheme associated with the *historical materialist* view of ancient history, a term developed by Engels' epigones. According to Balazs (1964) however, the transition was complex and centered around the conflict between large feudal land owners, a few

slave owners, a small revolutionary intelligentsia and other social classes such as merchants and money-lenders. This period consisted of both class struggles, and wars over raw materials, tribute and cheap labour between contending city states, culminating in a united China only in 221BC. There were ferocious battles between over 130 warring local tribal states, internal struggles between the nobility and insurrections by the serfs, which resulted in the eventual dominance of five large city states. These struggles provided the background to a number of works which summarised these experiences in the form of principles of war, diplomacy, including anti-war treatises, and economics. One work of the period is *A Dialogue Between Tang and Li* in which we read the following dialectical formulation: "My normal forces would seem extraordinary to the enemy, and my extraordinary seem normal. Extraordinary forces appear to be normal and normal, extraordinary; changes are unpredictable...It would have been impossible for us to win, if normal forces had not been disguised as extraordinary and extraordinary, normal", quoted in Sun Tzu (1993) page 41.

The Art of War, written by the military strategist Sun Tzu (1993) in about 500BC, the so-called Spring and Autumn period, is the most important of these military works for our purposes. The edition cited contains a commentary by the Maoist general Tao Hanzhang, who following Marx rather than Engels, defines *materialism* as "man's practical knowledge of the objective world which has been developed on the basis of his social practice". In keeping with the Maoist preoccupation with the fixed duality, materialism and idealism, Tao points out that Sun Tzu's short work is remarkable because it is written in a logical materialist style making almost no references whatever to magic, divination, myth, religion, and the like; "prohibit superstitious doubts", Sun Tzu says on page 126. Generals who thought "materialistically" opposed the more conventional ancient Chinese military thinkers who refused to fight on certain days of the year. The tribal concept of *force* was transformed from its religio-magical meaning into more secular concepts like *initiative*: "speed is of the essence of war", page 93. The enemy, says Sun, must be overcome by the use of wisdom rather than force alone: "foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from deductive calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation", page 83. Sun's thought is totalising because it insists on the need for the general to take account of "a comprehensive conflict embracing politics, economics, military force, and diplomacy", says Tao's commentary on page 19. Sun links war and economic relationships in logical steps: "carrying supplies for great distances renders the people destitute. Where troops are

gathered, prices go up. When prices rise, the wealth of the people is drained away. When wealth is drained away, the peasantry will be afflicted with urgent exactions”, page 90.

Sun Tzu notes the importance of the weather in turning disadvantages in advantages, in particular “the interaction of natural forces; the effects of day and night, rain and fair weather, cold and heat, time of day and seasons, and to make full use of of favourable conditions and avoid any negative factors”, page 20. In similar fashion to the *Dialogue* just cited, Sun Tzu uses the dialectic when he writes: “There are unending changes of the normal and extraordinary forces. They end and recommence - cyclical, as are the movements of the sun and moon. They die away and are reborn - recurrent, as are the passing seasons. Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage the enemy and the extraordinary to win. Therefore, the resources of those skilled in the use of extraordinary forces are as infinite as the heavens and earth, as inexhaustible as the flow of the great rivers...it is the skilful operation of the extraordinary and the normal forces that make an army capable of sustaining the enemy’s attack without suffering defeat.” He adds: “For these two forces are mutually reproductive; their interaction as endless as that of interlocking rings. Who can determine where one ends and the other begins?”, page 84.

There is a chapter in Sun Tzu’s text entitled ‘Void and Actuality’, a popular theme in ancient China, which can be compared to the yin-yang opposition discussed below. In this chapter Sun writes:

An army may be compared to water, for water in its natural flowing avoids the heights and hastens downwards. So in a war, an army should avoid strength and strike at weakness. As water shapes its flow in accordance with the nature of the ground, an army manages to be victorious in relation to the enemy it facing. As water retains no constant shape, so in war there are no constant conditions. One who can modify his tactics in accordance with the enemy’s situation and succeed in gaining victory may be called a divine, page 56.

In a later chapter Sun uses an analogy with a particular snake which, when *struck on the head, its tail attacks; when struck on the tail, its head attacks; and when struck in the center, both head and tail attack...Therefore exhibit the coyness of a maiden, until the enemy loses his alertness and gives you an opening, then move as swiftly as a hare, and the enemy will be unable to resist you, page 57.*

The commentary by General Tao is in keeping with the style of the original text when he brings to mind the interpenetration of opposites, and the duality essence and appearance. He explains that: *In employing troops, there must be interchangeable elements of 'actuality' in 'void', and 'void' in 'actuality'. Normally, it is easier to adopt the form of 'void' while being strong than from a weak position... 'Void' and 'actuality' are interchangeable and limited by time. It is often difficult to see through the enemy's changes. Therefore, it is essential to have wise, active, flexible, courageous, and careful commanders*, page 55.

As Sun notes, whilst “the battlefield may seem in confusion and chaos...one’s array must be in good order”, page 110. His dialectical style is clear in the following: “when the enemy is at ease be able to tire him, when well fed to starve him, when at rest to make him move”, page 111, and “of the five elements, none is always predominant; of the four seasons, none lasts forever; of the days, some are long and some short, and the moon waxes and wanes. That is also the law of employing troops”, page 113.

An important part of the development of dialectics in Ancient China is the yin-yang principle, which consists of the two polar opposites which both constitute and govern the cosmos. The yang is active, male, high and heavenly, whereas the yin is passive, female, low and earthly. The two rise and fall relative to each other, in an essential relationship underpinning appearances such as the processes of natural change from light to darkness, motion and rest, hot and cold, and social change such as the rise and fall of dynasties. Many twentieth century thinkers, including the psychologist Jung and the physicist Bohr, have been impressed by the yin-yang principle which seems to date back at least to the Chou dynasty of 1100BC. The following extract from a poem concerns an appeal for the yin to calm the intense struggles of the period:

*South Mountain with its beetling crags,
Rank foliage on its every slope.
The Grand-Master in his fearful might
Spreads dire injustice through the land.
Calamity and woe from Heaven abound:
Death and destruction hand in hand!
And you, our curses in your ears,
Repent not, nor bewail your deeds.*

*This Yin, great officer of state,
The prop and shield of sovereign Chou,
To hold the balance in the land
That near and far may have one mind,*

From the *Book of Odes*, quoted on page 1 of Hughes (1942).

A well known exponent of the yin-yang principle was Tsou Yen who, although his works are lost, had a reputation for using a 'dualism in monism' concept in conjunction with the five dynamic forces: wood, fire, soil, metal and water. The overall effect is consistent with "all things realizing their potentialities to the full", quoted on page 219 of Hughes. A description of the principle is given in an "amplification" quoted on pages 269-70:

The Yin and Yang forces in the universe, do they not involve the tangled skein of change? With these forces coming in ordered juxtaposition the principle of change is established within their scope of operations. For, if these two forces were abolished there would be no way by which changes could emerge to view, and if changes could not so emerge, the heavens and the earth would almost cease to function.

Although most of the schools of philosophy in ancient China began as a radical critique of the status quo, all were eventually banished or rendered harmless by being integrated into the imperialist orthodoxy. This is true of Mohism, a philosophy derived from the artisan class, the Tillers, utopian farmers and artisans, and Taoism, which eventually became the official philosophy of the Han dynasty. The main source of radical Taoism is the *Tao Te Ching*, a long poem which attacks Confucian orthodoxy. It is currently thought to be a collection of writings from different Taoist authors rather than the work of Loa Tan, or Lao-Tzu, who is quoted by Schwaller as saying:" In order to expand, one must first contract; in order to contract, one must expand.", pages 11-12. The search for the "unchangeable Tao", or way, is reminiscent of the more static thought of the Greek sage Parmenides. The overcoming of desire is an important theme early in the poem, but far from retaining this static view the poem soon compares ideas to their opposites, and sets up a unity between the resulting polarities. Speaking of the sage, the poem states: "Surely it is because he has no personal desires that he is able to fulfil his desires.", Hughes page 147. The following two passages are also dialectical:

The whole world knows that beauty is beauty: and this is (to know) ugliness.

Every one knows that goodness is goodness: and this is (to know) what is not good.

Thus it is: existence and non-existence give birth to each other:

The hard and the easy complete each other:

the long and the short are comparatively so:

the high and the less high are so by testing:

the orchestra and the choir make a harmony:

And the earlier and the later follow on each other.

This is why the sage abides by actionless activity,

And puts into practice wordless teaching.

Quoted in Hughes page 145.

The object you look at and cannot see is called 'invisible';

The sound you listen to but cannot hear is called 'inaudible':

The thing you try to grasp but cannot get hold of is called 'intangible';

These three (qualities) it is impossible to investigate to the end;

And thus it is that they blend and make One.

This oneness on its upper side is not light,

On its under side is not dark.

It has unbroken succession (in time),

For it goes right back to the (time when there was) nothing.

Thus it is called the 'form of the formless', the 'image of the non-material'.

Thus it is called 'indistinguishable',

For if you go to meet it, you can see no front to it,

If you follow after it, you can see no back.

Lay hold of (this) ancient truth.

By it you can be master of you present existence,

You can know how antiquity began,

And that is a clue to the Tao.

Quoted on page 150.

Attacking Confucianist sages, and giving us an insight into class struggles of the period, on page 152 the poem states:

Away with these 'wise men'!

The profit to the people will be a hundred per cent.

Away with these 'human-hearted men'!

Away with these 'just men'!

The people will turn back to filial piety and (plain) kindness.

Away with these skilful artisans!

Away with these profit-making merchants!

Thieves and robbers will cease to exist.

Another Taoist sage, of the fourth century B.C., was Chaung Tzu (1998), who hints at the dialectical interplay of freedom and necessity when he says that those who follow the Tao are free, a resonant philosophy with the peasants and artisans. As the introduction to the text, by van der Weyer, explains: "To the logical and practical western mind, much of Chuang Tzu's teaching is an affront; and for this reason it is sometimes hard to grasp. He relished contradictions and he loved to undermine conventional wisdom", page 16. According to Chuang a sage "draws a clear distinction between the inner and outer realms", page 19; and says that "I may regard an object as 'this; but another person may regard the same object as 'that'. Thus we can say that 'this' and 'that are born out of one another. But where there is birth, there is also death; and where there is death, there is birth. Similarly where there is possibility, there is impossibility; and where there is impossibility, there is possibility. In the same way, where people recognise right, they also recognise wrong – and vice versa. The wise person cannot proceed by opposite, but by the Way. On the Way this and that contain one another; so do right and wrong...Through the Way all things are seen as one, regardless of their completeness or their difference. Those who follow the Way are able to see the unity of all things" pages 24-6. Chuang is wrestling with the problems of what is and what is not, which shows more philosophical abstraction than is displayed in tribal dialectics. He says: "There is order in chaos, and certainty in doubt. The wise are guided by this order and certainty...There is what is, and there is what is not. It is not easy to confirm that what is not, is not. This is a statement. Yet I do not know whether my statements affirm what is, or affirm what is not", pages 26-7.

In the late fourth century there developed a group of thinkers, described by Hughes as "dialecticians". Maspero (1978) uses this term for thinkers, including Mo-Tzu, who study logic or those, like Kung-Sun Lung and Hui Shih, who engage in disputation and thereby hope to prove their opponents' ideas wrong. Maspero and Hook (1982) describe these thinkers as "Sophists", a

school of philosophers considered in depth in the next chapter, of whom Hui Shih was the first. These radical Sophist-dialecticians have been compared to the Greek Zeno, who according to Aristotle invented dialectics, in that they developed paradoxes and aphorisms which suggested both a relativist view of knowledge and the primacy of change. The following paradoxes of Hui are quoted from Hughes pages 120-1: “a creature exactly when he is born is exactly (beginning to) die...The myriad things in Nature are both completely similar and completely dissimilar. This state of affairs should be described as a great similarity-in-dissimilarity...To-day I go to Yueh State and I arrive there in the past...the hub of the world is north of Yen State and south of Yueh State...the heavens and the earth are one composite body.”

Kung-Sun Lung, a disciple of Hui Shih, similarly tried to articulate and explain paradoxes, most famously in *A Discussion on White Horses*, and *Twenty-One Paradoxes*. The latter includes the following: “Fire is not hot (i.e. the sensation of heat is in us and not in the fire)...Eyes do not see (i.e. it is the mind which perceives by means of the eye and light)...T-squares are not square, and compasses cannot make circles (i.e. T-squares and compasses cannot be relied on to make the perfect square and the perfect circle as visualised by the mind)...The shadow of a flying bird never moves...A dog can be a sheep (? meaning that since everything is in process of changing into something else, therefore a dog can become a sheep)”, quoted in Hughes page 128. This school also stated what later came to be known as the law of non-contradiction: “In argument, (a thing) is designated as ox, or it is designated as non-ox: the one excludes the other”, quoted in Maspero page 334.

In the third century BC an unidentified group of Mohist-influenced thinkers also engaged in the process of trying to unravel and explain paradoxes. However, in doing so they sometimes introduced new contradictions. They used a term which Hughes translates as “dialectic” to refer to this process, although he fails to supply the original Chinese word, which also addresses the logical and epistemological issues raised by their philosophical opponents. It is clear from their writings, which are often difficult to understand in the original, that all sides to these disputes were able to use analogies, expose fallacies and construct arguments. The following quotes introduce important themes in dialectical thought:

The interpenetration of hardness and whiteness (in the same object) is complete.

Interpenetration= mutually getting.

The parts of a body interpenetrate but not completely.

Similarity=in some respects interpenetrating, in some respects not.

...

A 'that' (i.e. a proposition, a subject for dialectical discussion) must not be two different things if it is to be allowed (as a subject of discussion).

In re a 'that': (for example) 'All cows are not-cows': to have two concepts (of the proposition) is in all cases wrong.

Dialectic=contending over a 'that', and in dialectic the right wins.

In re dialectic: (for example) one party says that is a cow and another party says it is not a cow; this is contending over a 'that' and the parties cannot both be right. Since they are not both right, one of them must be wrong. Quoted on page 131 of Hughes.

Action=preserving, destroying, exchanging, lessening, increasing, or transforming.

In re action: to fortify a rampart is (characteristic of) preserving, to contaminate (characteristic of) destruction to buy and sell (characteristic of) exchanging, to smelt ore of diminishing, to grow bigger of increasing, frogs becoming rats of transforming.

...

Likeness and unlikeness taken together=disclosing to view what exists in a thing and what does not.

In re likeness and unlikeness taken together: for example, the practice in rich families of achieving reciprocity in the exchange of the good things they possess for those they do not. They compare and measure quantities, allowing so many oysters in return for so many silkworms, Hughes, pages 133-4.

'Fire is not hot': the explanation lies in perception... 'For a man to know what he does not know': the explanation lies in selection and rejection by means of names... 'Non-existence is not necessarily conditioned by existence': the explanation lies in the matter under consideration. In re non-existence: if a thing arrives at non-existence, then it first existed and afterwards ceased to exist, as for example, if horses ceased to exist. But if the sky fell down, there would be now existence piled on non-existence. page 135-6.

With regard to dialectic, it sets out to make clear the dividing line between truth and error, (and so) to discriminate the different threads which constitute order and disorder: to make clear the relative positions of likeness and unlikeness, and to examine the logic of names in

relation to actualities, to distinguish between the beneficial and the harmful and to resolve doubts.

This passage, quoted in Hughes, page 137, who points out in a footnote that “these later Mohists were deeply convinced of the need for order in thinking as a condition for order in society.” This point implicitly draws attention to the argument that there will inevitably be a relationship, though not a simple reflection, between the patterns of thought and the social struggles of a given historical period.

The social struggles of ancient India

Thapar’s *A History of India volume one* (1966) analyses the tensions of ancient Indian society. She begins by making the point, long before Bernal, that western attitudes, and those of the Indian intelligentsia, towards India have undergone considerable change due to a range of social factors. Each of these attitudes, whether based on the vantage point of colonial occupation, the current mind-body-spirit market, or comparisons with Greece, represents a kind of moment, to use a Hegelian term, and is therefore important in adding to our understanding of the whole. Much of the earliest source material is from oral traditions later written in Sanskrit texts by the priests, or Brahmins. As a result the texts were “biased in favour of those in authority and generally adhered to the brahmanical interpretation of the past, irrespective of its historical validity”, page 18. On the static image of India, in which there is only repetition or cyclical time, a view encouraged by Hegel and Marx, she says “there is in India a continuous cultural tradition extending over three thousand years, but this continuity should not be confused with stagnation”, page 20. Thapar’s greatest merit however, is to link philosophical and religious thought to material reality, to social struggle and development.

Thapar considers the controversial Aryan issue, emphasising the tensions resulting from the racial and cultural dimensions introduced by the movement of these central Asian people to India in about 1500BC. She notes that the city states of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, which were at their peak around 2300BC, were populated by people who were more advanced than the later pre-urban Aryan invaders, with their proto Indo-European language and less civilised culture. However, as the Aryans settled and learned from the native population, its priest caste

established a virtual monopoly over intellectual labour. The result has come down to us in the form of the *Rig Vedas*, and later *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads*, written by generations of Brahmans. Apart from religion and philosophy, these works speak of the redivision of labour, inter-tribal wars, wars with native tribes, land disputes, including the change from communal to private property, and cattle stealing. Through these works, the Brahmans announced their rise to dominance in the new Aryan imposed hereditary caste system. The priests eventually established themselves above the *kshatriyas*, or warrior caste, and the *vaishyas*, prosperous landowners and traders. The lowest castes were the *shudras*, mainly darker skinned natives, or *Dasas*, and those of mixed parentage, some of whom later became the untouchables, the lowest caste of all. As this extract from a *Rig Veda* hymn explains, each part of the human body was associated with a caste:

The brahman was his mouth, of his arms were made the warrior.

His thighs became the vaishya, of his feet the shudra was born.

Quoted on pages 39-40 of Thapar.

Buddhism, Jainism and other sects opposed to the dominance of the Brahmans drew their support in large part from the *shudra* by disavowing the caste system altogether. Others sought to avoid the rigid system by resorting to asceticism, withdrawing from society and denying Vedic beliefs. By 700BC the local village-based tribal system was in serious decline and found itself in profound contradiction with the monarchies, which embraced the caste system, and with the republics which were in the ascendancy. Some tribes took on a republican social formation, and in certain cases the members maintained a measure of decision making power in local assemblies. Buddhists and Jainians were keen on such institutions, since their founders came from tribes which adopted comparatively democratic methods. However, more generally the social dislocation involved in the process of change, especially the establishment of intolerant monarchies and urbanisation, added to the desire of supporters of these religions to escape from the new social formations. This challenged the Brahmans' dominance of thought and ritual, which provided their livelihood and power within the caste system.

Dialectical thought in ancient India

Early Aryan thought was heavily influenced by tribal dialectics, including animistic beliefs and the idea that fire acts as a link between gods and humans; themes which are in evidence in the early hymns of the *Rig Vedas*. Eurocentric writers tend to denigrate the mythical thought found in the *Vedas*, failing to realise that much of the thought of their own society, its religion, festivals, nationalism, and much else, is based on myth. The denigration often forms part of a programme to show that all thought prior to the Greeks was “pre-philosophical” or “pre-rational”. Sproul (1979) writes sympathetically about myth, discussing some of the dialectical Vedic themes. Although her religious perspective leads her to neglect the *social* aspects of myth, she points out the recurring theme of a relationship between an unchanging timeless One and the flux of the Many: “religions go beyond the universe of change to consider the changeless structures basic to it”, page 21. In later chapters we will examine how dialectical thinkers have dealt with the issue of interpreting “the unchanging One”.

Sproul stresses the dialectical aspects of both tribal and ancient creation myths, because “they do not just reflect random attitudes toward reality. Rather, they begin with a perception of reality as a whole and in its light construct an integrated system for understanding all its parts...Although these myths are of varying degrees of profundity, at their best they consider the essential structure of the *whole* of reality: matter, spirit, nature, society, and culture. They consider the origin and nature of being, the very fact of existence. Thus the *Rig-Vedas*, the earliest hymns of which were composed about c. 1200BC, begins” (page 5):

*Then neither Being nor Not-Being was
Nor atmosphere, nor firmament, nor what is beyond.
What did it encompass? Where? In whose protection?
What was water, the deep, unfathomable?
Neither death nor immortality was there then,
No sign of night or day.
That One breathed, windless, by its own energy:
Nought else existed then.
In the beginning was darkness swathed in darkness;
All this was but unmanifested water.
Whatever was, the One, coming into being,*

*Hidden by the Void,
Was generated by the power of heat.
In the beginning this (One) evolved,
Became desire, first seed of mind.
Wise seers, searching within their hearts.
Found the bond of Being in Not-Being...
Their cord was extended athwart:
Was there a below? Was there an above?
Casters of seed there were, and powers:
Beneath was energy, above was impulse...
Quoted on page 183 of Sproul.*

This famous hymn draws attention to a number of the dialectical themes which, to a limited extent, we have already considered. However, Sproul does not link them to their social context, i.e. the Brahmins, the “Wise seers” or “mouths of the Vedas”, struggling to justify their privileges in the caste system, and especially to establish their status relative to the warrior caste. The nearest she comes to explaining the social basis of the hymns is when she states they “tell of great battles between the old, degenerate gods of the conquered people and the young, energetic deities of the conquerors”, page 29. Sproul also fails to see the full significance of the concept of *desire* in this hymn. It is a term, discussed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, which indicates our link with nature and the rest of society. We are not indifferent to our world but linked to it through impulses for food, clothing, shelter, sexual gratification, affection, beauty, and the like. Desire links a one to an other, a subject to an object, so that it can be a force which totalises the world.

The importance of desire is partially recognised by Sproul in an extract from a Maori chant, also quoted in the previous chapter, which links conception with desire through a chain of progressive developments:

*From the conception the increase,
From the increase the thought,
From the thought the remembrance
From the remembrance the consciousness,
From the consciousness the desire.*

Commenting on this quote, Sproul adds that desire implies an “object of desire: the idea and reality of the world”, page 23. She discusses the way in which myths sometimes attempt to probe into the nature of reality, or “ground of being”, by developing *negative* concepts like the unknown, the unknowable, nothing, and the even more negative: nothing-that-was-not, all of which are important dialectical ideas. We should also note the animistic approach, which in some Vedic thought suggests the existence of totalising spirits behind the appearance of reality. An example of this idea is found in another early Indian text, the *Kena Upanishad* (800-400BC):

Who sends the mind to wander afar? Who first drives life to start on its journey?

Who impels us to utter these words? Who is the Spirit behind the eye and the ear?...

We know not, we cannot understand, how he can be explained: He is above the known, and he is above the unknown.

Sproul, page 8.

Although her arguments about early Indian thought are at times static, due to her religious interpretation of an unchanging One, Sproul shows how our understanding of our world, as revealed in tribal and ancient myth, often relies on the use of polar opposites: “We categorise things by how much they are like any one part of such a pair of opposites, how unlike the other they are...Now the most basic of such pairings is being and not-being, the positive and negative alternatives expressed in terms of existence. And, as with all polar oppositions, the parts of this primary one require each other. What ‘is’ derives from what ‘is not’; what ‘is not’ comes from what ‘is’. Which came first, being or not being? Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”, pages 8-9. Or as the *Chandogya Upanishad* (c.700BC) expresses the problem:

1. In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being, one only, without a second. To be sure, some people say: ‘In the beginning this world was just Not-Being, one only, without a second; that from Not-Being Being was produced.’

2. But verily, my dear, whence could this be? said he. How from Not-Being could Being be produced? On the contrary, in the beginning this world was just Being, one only, without a second.

Quoted in Sproul page 9.

In response to this *positive* one-sided solution, non-being arising from being, Sproul points out that picking either of the sides of the opposition, Being or Not-Being, chicken or egg, is to remain within a riddle. Demonstrating the continuity between tribal thought and ancient thought, she uses an example of a Maori chant which takes the negative solution:

From nothing the begetting

From nothing the increase

From nothing the abundance

The power of increasing

The living breath...

Quoted in Sproul page 9.

She claims that the *Rig-Veda* solution to the problem is the correct one when it states: “Neither Being nor Not-Being was there then...Only the One breathed, windless, by its own energy”, quoted on page 9. It is similar to ancient Egyptian dialectics, which speaks of transcending, yet preserving the interdependence of, the positive and negative in the form of the primal chaos. This is the “raw clay”, in which there is the *potentiality* for both the positive and negative, day and night, spirit and matter, good and evil, which starts off the creation *process* and thus engenders change and development. A similar idea is found in the Hopi American Indian myth, which has the infinite conceiving the finite:

The first world was Tokpela (Endless Space).

But first, they say, there was only the Creator, Taiowa. All else was endless space. There was no beginning and no end, no time, no shape, no life. Just an immeasurable void that had its beginning and end, time, shape, and life in the mind of Taiowa the Creator. Then he, the infinite, conceived the finite.

Quoted in Sproul, page 17.

Another key dialectical theme is the duality essence-appearance, which is discussed in the *Upanishads* in the following dialogue between a father and son:

Fetch me a fruit of the Banyan tree.

Here is one, sir.

Break it.

I have broken it, sir.

What do you see?

Very tiny seeds, sir.

Break one.

I have broken it, sir.

What do you see now?

Nothing, sir.

My son, what you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists.

Believe me, my son, in that essence is the self of all that is. That is the True, That is the Self...

Quoted on page 47 of Thapar.

Jainism and the dialectic

As we have seen, wandering ascetics and “sophists” produced heterodox philosophical systems which, in India, challenged the Brahman orthodoxy. From these social phenomena a number of more organised groups emerged, including the atheistic materialists, the Carvakas, who accused the Brahmans of speaking “vain and lying nonsense” (Thapar page 64), the Buddhists and Jainians. The latter two eventually became mass religions, despite their atheistic tendencies, and ceased to challenge the monarchies in an overt political way. As was the case with Christianity, the social origins and philosophy of Jainism and Buddhism are obscured in mythology, which developed quickly as part of the establishment of a new religious orthodoxy based round the lives and alleged teachings of their leaders. These two faiths described politics as “evil”, and advocated a life of quiet contemplation. Embree (1988) emphasises that Jainas and Buddhists developed the doctrine of transmigration, although Buddhists rejected the concept of the unchanging soul, beyond the orthodox version found in the *Upanishads*: “With this belief in transmigration came a passionate desire for escape, for unison with something that lay beyond the dreary cycle of birth and death and rebirth, for timeless being, in place of transitory and therefore unsatisfactory existence”, pages 44-5. Given the considerable social upheavals of the period it is no surprise that the doctrine became popular, particularly amongst some of the lower castes.

Mahavira, the sixth century teacher known as “the Conqueror”, renounced Vedic orthodoxy and became an ascetic in the Ganges valley. His ideas, based on those of a number of earlier thinkers, were at first transmitted orally, but were eventually recorded in the third century BC. He had a totalising view of the universe, claiming that it passes “through a series of cosmic waves of progress and decline”, Thapar page 65. Crucial to the Jaina philosophy is the idea that our knowledge is

always partial because it depends on the vantage point of the knower, as is illustrated by the six blind men story, in which they each touch a part of a elephant, but insist that the part they touch is not part of an elephant but is respectively a rope, a snake, a tree trunk, etc. It is a reaction against the more orthodox idea that one should aim for total or absolute knowledge as a means of salvation. The Jaina non-violent doctrine, including not killing any animal or insect because it possesses a soul, was a form of tribal animism. It was a direct challenge to Vedic sacrifice, excluding certain castes, such as warriors and agriculturalists, yet including others, particularly manufacturers, traders, money lenders and other urban occupations.

Much Jainian thought is recorded in medieval texts, such as an early one from Jinasena, which rejects the creation suggesting instead a more dialectical alternative:

Know that the world is uncreated, as time itself is, without beginning and end.

And it is based on the principles, life and the rest.

Uncreated and indestructible, it endures under the compulsion of its own nature.

Quoted on page 11 of Sproul.

The most famous aspect of Jaina thought is known from a 12th century text by Hemacandra, which in the main attacks the Carvakas, Hindus and Buddhists, but also sets out what has come to be known as Jainian seven valued logic. Although Embree claimed that this form of thinking existed in the sixth century BC, we can only speculate about the extent to which the text sets out a form of logic actually used by Jaina thinkers of that period. To the extent that it does, it represents the most advanced form of thought in the ancient world, with profound implications for the concept of ideology, and is the earliest example of thought becoming self conscious, to use a Hegelian term which refers to thinking formally about the links between thought and reality, in particularly thinking about thought. The Hegelian idea that the world is experienced by groups and individuals from particular vantage points or *moments*, later developed in Marx's *Capital*, is set out in the following summarised list of the seven values on page 261 of Radhakrishnan and Moore (1957):

1. *Somehow a thing is.*
2. *Somehow a thing is not.*
3. *Somehow a thing is and is not.*
4. *Somehow it is indescribable.*
5. *Somehow it is and is indescribable.*
6. *Somehow it is not and is indescribable.*

7. *Somehow it is , is not, and is indescribable.*

The interpretation of the term 'indescribable' in line 4 seems to be the articulation and reconciliation of being and non-being, posited as a contradiction in line 3. Critics have asked why there are only seven possibilities, to which the medieval commentary replies: "the elders say: 'As many as are the ways of speaking about a thing, so many are the statements of the standpoint-method.' Nevertheless, seven standpoints have been taught by ancient scholars by making seven meanings all-inclusive", quoted on page 268. However, on page 77 Embree states that: "The first four of the seven divisions are fairly clear and intelligible. The last three divisions, on the other hand, are a pedantic refinement of the theory, and some early Jain schools did not accept them". On the same page, Embree lists another seven divisions which relate to the distinction between the abstract and the concrete in the context of level of analysis. So, for example, we can consider a particular person as an individual or as a member of a group, or we can consider the person at this point in time or include his or her future or past. Unfortunately Embree fails to see the crucial significance of this aspect of Indian thought, especially for the explanation of ideology, dealing as it does with what Ollman (1993) calls "level of abstraction", to be considered in Chapter Ten.

Moore's commentary on such logic states: "Thus understood, no absolute affirmation or negation is possible about anything, for the nature of things is too complex to be exhausted in any single predication. Thus, all predications are predications only from a particular point of view", page 262. Criticisms of this mode of thought in ancient India, and 20th century criticisms such as those of Karl Popper, are in essence the same in claiming that the statement in line 3 is inherently contradictory and leads to conceptual chaos: everything and nothing is possible. In answer to this Moore, on the same page, points out:

This criticism is regarded by the adherent of this doctrine as actually missing the very point, for, according to this doctrine, contradictions are avoided only when statements are made from different points of view. Jaina logic admits that contradictory statements cannot be made about the same thing in the same sense at the same time and place, but stresses the fact that contradiction can be avoided only by their own doctrine...in which every statement is made only from a particular point of view. The charge of contradiction lies, if at all, at the door of the absolutist, who affirms or denies a statement about a thing from no point of view, as it were, which according to the Jaina logician, is invalid.

Although, as argued in later chapters, there a number of weaknesses in Moore's argument, his explanation makes the crucial point that a contradiction must be articulated and explained, and as a result is 'resolved' in thought, if not in practice. However, we must bear in mind the point that each articulation has to be concrete, otherwise this form of logic is in danger of becoming an empty abstraction because, like the rules of formal logic, it implies that it is 'all-inclusive' or universally valid. Thus, a concrete example, which relates to two ideologically opposed standpoints in contemporary political economy, can be demonstrated by the first four lines listed above:

1. *Somehow a thing is.* From the point of view of the capitalist owner the company's wage bill is a cost which reduces profit.
2. *Somehow it is not.* From the point of view of the company's workforce their wages are income, income which could be higher if profits were reduced.
3. *Somehow it both is and is not.* So from these two different perspectives wages both are and are not costs.
4. *Somehow it is indescribable.* However, the fact that we can see these two different standpoints implies that we have adopted a third "indescribable" standpoint, one which totalises the other two.

Embree astutely observes that this mode of thinking was in part responsible for the tolerant attitude of the Jains towards their rivals: they understood that their rivals' views corresponded to their respective vantage points and were not false, but only partial. The significance of this point, and the other important aspects of Jaina thought, are lost on Chattopadhyaya (1979). Although he sees that these polemics have a basis in social struggle, when speaking of "compromise" in the following quote, on page 132-3, he reveals his lack of understanding of Hegelian *moments*, and totalising thought in general. He says of Jainism:

It was an effort to steer a middle course between the Upanishadic doctrine of the ultimate reality being absolutely permanent, i.e., without beginning, change and end, and the Buddhistic doctrine of the eternal flux. Instead of subscribing to any of these alternatives, which were considered to be extremes, the Jainas wanted to effect a compromise and acknowledge partial truth in both. Permanence was true and so was change. Accordingly, reality was viewed as not of permanent and unalterable nature; it underwent the processes of production, continuation and destruction... Thus, clay may be regarded as permanent, but the form of a jar of clay or its colour may come into existence and perish.

Chattopadhyaya goes on reveal his limited understanding of dialectical thought in general:

Obviously, it is difficult to maintain such a position with any real philosophical seriousness. One cannot, e.g. seriously claim that idealism is somehow true and so also is materialism...A philosopher has necessarily to be a partisan in the sense of being a positive defender of his own views, quoted on pages 134-5.

The fixed opposition between 'materialism' and 'idealism', along with the failure to realise that social struggle promotes an increasingly totalising mode of thought, are typical of Leninism, which we consider in Chapter Nine. Totalising, or "indescribable", thought is superior to a partial or one-sided view of reality as seen from a particular vantage point. When we come to consider the term *critique*, this point will become clearer, especially in its relevance to people in struggles for emancipation.

Buddhism

Gautama Buddha, a contemporary of Mahavira, shared the latter's views on the caste system, atheism and the cosmic rise and fall. He, like Mahavira, came from the warrior caste, and had his origins in the movement associated with the republicanism of the Shakya tribe. Buddha is reported to have rejected his position as prince of the tribe, becoming firstly an ascetic and later an advocate of meditation on the suffering of the world. Preaching his famous sermon near Banaras, Buddha explained that suffering is caused by desire, and that therefore through adopting the Middle Way desire can be overcome. This leads to an end to suffering and salvation, in the form of an end to the cycle of rebirth and the attainment of *nirvana*. However, Embree says:

The legends that were told about him in later times are mostly unreliable, though they may contain grains of historical truth. Moreover many of the sermons and other pronouncements attributed to him are not his, but the work of teachers in later times, and there is considerable doubt as to the exact nature of his original message, page 92.

The inclusion of women as nuns was a challenge to Vedic orthodoxy, as was the appeal to the masses of the lowest urban castes and substitution of the Magadhi language for the Vedic Sanskrit. The social essence of the new religion eventually became its support for the interests of the urban manufacturers, merchants and money lenders; although its monks claimed to represent the masses. The dialectical aspects of early Buddhism centre around the idea of continuous flux: everything, including the gods and the souls of living beings, are constantly changing, they have no permanence

or individuality. Buddhists remain sceptical about any essential reality behind the fleeting world of the senses: "Whereof we cannot speak we must remain silent", Radhakrishnan and Moore, page 273. Desire, which according to Buddhists is the attempt to establish individuality, was the search for permanence where none could be found, and therefore led only to frustration and suffering. Although this philosophy is a negation of the potentiality for meaningful human life, the obsession with abstract "suffering" originally corresponds to tribal society's inability to resist the extermination and brutal subjugation of their members by new monarchies. Buddha's insistence on perpetual movement is an important development in the history of thought: "Two symbols are generally used to illustrate this conception - the stream of water and 'the self-producing and the self-consuming' flame", quoted on page 130 of Chattopadhyaya. Also significant is the Buddhist idea of a causal chain in explaining becoming: things depend on each other in a series of totalising relationships: "that being present, this becomes; from the arising of that, this arises...that being absent, this does not become; from the cessation of that, this ceases", page 128 of Chattopadhyaya. Further development in the dialectical aspects of Buddhist thought are considered in the next chapter.

Dialectics in ancient Mesopotamia

In the last chapter we noted that one of the key principles of tribal magic involved the idea that to know the true name of a thing, or person, is to have power over it. In Sumerian myth the totalising pantheon creates the various parts of nature by pronouncing their true names. As the older tribal laws were replaced by royal fiat, the priests developed their occult systems accordingly, and their arithmetic, geometry and *ziggurat* architecture represented the universal divine order. There is an example of the interrelations of Akkadian thought when Childe points out that their word for "working out a sum" is the same as "performing a ritual act", page 144. As was the case elsewhere, the priests, who dominated intellectual labour, synthesized astronomy and astrology as part of their study of what West (1992) calls the "Divine Principles" unlying the movements of the planets and stars.

In *The Great Year*, which is the essence of Mesopotamian astrology, Champion (1995) explains that this theory has both a naturalistic reductive determinist and a dialectical basis, and together these aspects underpinned their natural and social science. The naturalistic aspect is explained by the fact that the "Sun's diurnal and annual patterns, moving ceaselessly between the extremes of hot and

cold, and light and dark, provide a model of the whole of human existence...human history itself becomes a seasonal experience, moving from a collective winter to a collective summer and back again...From simple reverence for the Sun and Moon, the Mesopotamians, sometime before 2000BC, began to incorporate other stars into their political cosmology, and at this point astrology was born”, page 21. Champion uses a dialectical idiom when he points out that:

the study of the past in the ancient Near East was intimately connected with the need to know the future. The origins of historiography, literally the writing of history, are deeply bound up with political imperatives and religious devotion and the state's need to maintain order and guarantee its existence into the future...The future, then, can be understood only by reference to the past, and study of the past is necessary to know the future, page 9.

It may come as a surprise to know that Karl Popper noted the dialectical basis of astrology because its fatalistic philosophy “involves the contradictory conception that the knowledge of our fate may help us to influence this fate”, quoted in Champion page 23. Knowing society's future, as decreed by the Gods and revealed to the priests by the planetary and stellar movements, helps the king to change it. This paradox developed during a period when the warring Mesopotamians faced political uncertainty, and their lives depended upon the level of flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates, and the appropriate weather for a good crop: “The Mesopotamians lived in a world of paradox, walking a tightrope between the unalterable order of the cosmos and the anarchy into which that order might condemn them. By revering order and keeping a close watch on the anomalies it contained, they believed that they might steer a careful course, observing the cycles of time and seizing the best moment to act”, page 57.

For the Sumerians all simultaneously occurring events were associated, there was no concept of mere coincidence, *when* something happened was as important as *what* happened. Childe (1964) states: “Observation of the stars proved so successful in foretelling when to begin agricultural operations that the Sumerians were induced to hope by the same means to predict the unpredictable. In other words astronomy led to astrology, in pursuit of which the motions of heavenly bodies were studied not unprofitably by the Sumerians' cultural heirs.”, page 118. The circle of the heavens, or zodiac, was divided into twelve equal parts by the priests, though other subdivisions have been used in other cultures, twelve being a number with a totalising esoteric significance of multiplicity within unity. If we take these signs of the zodiac they contain the polarities male-female, active-passive and positive-negative. So Aries is positive, Taurus negative,

Gemini positive and so on. However, these polarities interpenetrate to form triads, for as West explains, in Chaldean thought: “The triad, the principle of three, expresses relationship. If the universe were homogeneous, nothing would happen. If it were merely dual, nothing could happen either. A state of eternal and unbridgeable tension between two equal and opposite forces would result. There must be a reconciling principle, a Third Force...one becomes two and three simultaneously...Man-Woman is a polarity, but Lover-Beloved-Desire is a relationship”, pages 32-33.

In astrology the triads, or Modes of Action, take the form of Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable and these are applied successively to each sign of the zodiac, so that Aries is cardinal and positive, Leo is fixed and positive, Virgo mutable and negative etc; consequently each sign conforms to a simultaneous dualistic and triadic configuration. However, says West, all this is too theoretical: “nothing has happened yet”, to make things happen, a law of four is superimposed over the two and three. This law is the four substances: earth, fire, air and water from tribal cosmology; thus Aries comes to life as positive, cardinal and fire. The full zodiac therefore contains twelve unique signs linked by a geometric figures which represent a “simultaneous fusion of polarity, triplicity and quadricity, and its harmonically determined aspects and angles, is a whole.”, page 38. All of this was thought by the Chaldeans to be the basis of a macrocosmic harmony, and each microcosmic part conformed to the same principle; a system similar to the cosmic principle of the Egyptians, which Pythagoras learned from them, which was later codified in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

One of the surviving texts of ancient Mesopotamia is the previously mentioned *Epic of Gilgamesh* (1960), which reveals the tensions engendered by Uruk’s lack of strategic raw materials in the militaristic third millenium. The introduction to the text explains a quarrel referred to in a poem of the period which “appears to revolve round the barter of corn from Uruk against precious metals, gold, silver, lapis lazuli and probably building stone from Aratta.”, page 19. The *Epic* reveals a number of tribal preoccupations such as secret knowledge, taboos, ambiguous metamorphoses between animals, mortal men and women, and immortal gods, with paradoxical aspects, summoning the forces of nature. We read, for example, about Gilgamesh who is two thirds god and one third man, Ishtar with her contradictory qualities as the goddess of love and war, “an awful and lovely goddess”, which may be explained as a synthesis of two tribal deities. Similarly the god Enlil ‘is “the word which stilleth the heaven above”, but he is also, “a rushing deluge that troubles the faces of

men, a torrent which destroys the bulwarks””, page 25. The myth reveals themes such as the alienated relationship between men and women and the tension between the countryside and the ancient city, as evidenced by the early appearance of Enkidu. He is a grass eating man reared with animals, who is seduced by a harlot from the temple of love in the city, and as a result is rejected by the animals. Aspects of the class structure and the division of labour in Uruk are revealed by mention of sages, masters and servants, priestesses and counselors of the city. There are more examples of polar opposites in the *Epic*, such as heroes waxing and waning, but the following comment of the immortal sage, king and priest, called Utnapishtim, is profound:

There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand for ever, do we seal a contract to hold for all time? Do brothers divide an inheritance to keep for ever, does the flood-time of rivers endure? It is only the nymph of the dragon-fly who sheds her larva and sees the sun in his glory. From the days of old there is no permanence. The sleeping and the dead, how alike they are, they are like a painted death. What is there between the master and the servant when both have fulfilled their doom?, page 104.

An example of ancient Persian dialectics

Hicks (1975) suggests that Zoroastrianism has to be understood as the ideological component of a Persian nationalist movement, culminating in the large empire established in the sixth century BC. The Achaemenids, the Persian ruling family, took up the new faith in order to sever links with their Vedic past and create a uniquely Persian culture. Tomlin (1959) provides some useful material on Zoroaster, a Greek rendering of Zarathustra, but fails to identify either the social basis of his movement or its dialectical idioms. Zoroaster's movement was probably composed of a small group of Magi, hereditary priests, of the old faith who set up a rival faith and soon obtained royal patronage in Eastern Iran. 628BC is the likeliest date of birth for Zoroaster, though legend states 6000BC, explaining his death as due to being enveloped in a flash of lightning. Ninth century AD Pahlavi texts treat his life in a way reminiscent of tribal dialectics in that the distinctions between animals, humans and gods are not fixed. The movement was initially revolutionary, firstly because it challenged the Vedic pantheon and replaced it with a more monotheistic system, and secondly because it introduced the possibility of individual choice between good and evil, thus being a blueprint for Christianity. Clearly the

old tribal ideology, with its capricious gods and vested interests, was challenged by Zoroaster, his Magi priesthood and their royal patron.

The opposition between good and evil existed in the faith prior to Zoroaster, but he introduced a greater level of sophistication to the theology. He posited two basic principles of the universe, the first of two opposites is Ahoora-Mazda, and a number of related gods, which represents light and good who are in the above, before the existence of time; and the second opposite Ahriman, or darkness and evil, existing below, with open space between the two. However, these are not fixed polarities but rather, like the yin-yang, engage in a battle which animates all of nature and society, with its positive features created by Ahoora-Mazda, and its evil and defects “counter-created” by Ahriman. The myth explains that Ahriman, unaware of the existence of Ahoora-Mazda, chances upon a ray of light over which he tries to gain power, and notes its antagonistic properties. However, the witchcraft of Ahriman is confounded by the “pure words” of Ahoora-Mazda. Maclagan (1977) suggests that the confrontation obliges Ahoora-Mazda to create a world in *time*, which “contaminates his integrity”, page 28; thus introducing another polarity between the unmoving and timeless, on the one hand, and movement and time on the other. Ahoora-Mazda produces a proto-humanity having only the power to reflect, without the power to speak or eat. The first true human is actually born by the mysterious interpenetration of the force of evil, or Ahriman, with that of good, Ahoora-Mazda.

Hegel (1952), like Nietzsche, was probably affected by the ‘Aryan’ origins of Zoroastrianism, the Persians being part of the Iranian family of tribes, which in turn was part of the mass of nomadic peoples who originally left southern Russia in about 2000BC. This ‘Aryan’ connection probably disposed him to be impressed by the dialectical aspects of Zoroastrianism, a fact which perhaps contributed to Engels’ decision to learn Persian. According to Hegel the principle of light is “sensuous universality itself; simple manifestation...the signification of the spiritual...the form of the good and the true, the substantiality of knowledge and volition as well as of all natural things. Light puts man in a position to be able to exercise choice”, page 238. Hegel comments on the antithesis between light and darkness, and the other corresponding polar oppositions, claiming that, whilst the Persian myth partially resolves the contradiction or recognises “the unity of the antithesis”, it only does so either by going back to a “*primal* existence” prior to these oppositions, or by light conquering, and thereby

eliminating, darkness. These remarks suggest that Hegel's thought is limited by his Eurocentric agenda, for him it is only with the Greeks does 'true' dialectical thought begin.

Concluding remarks

Despite a degree of doubt due to the vagaries of translation, there can be little question that there developed a number of dialectically orientated philosophies in the various states and cities of the ancient world. Compared to tribal anthropocentrism, the form of the ancient dialectic was at times more secular and immanent, i.e. suggesting the universe was dialectical *in itself*, irrespective of human consciousness. The content of the dialectic was largely normally nature, rather than society, though natural contradictions are in large part a sublimation of social contradictions. Dialectics was normally the preserve of the occult knowledge of the priest class; however, in China and India, the dialectic was part of the philosophy of recalcitrant courtiers and artisans, who in some cases sympathised with the peasant masses in their struggles against their rulers. Thus in the ancient world we are introduced to itinerant philosophers, anticipating the Sophists, who undoubtedly made an important contribution to dialectics in ancient and classical Greece, to where we now turn our attention.

Chapter Three

Ancient Greece

The ancient Greek *polis*

The Greek dialektiké, from dialégomai, 'converse' or 'discuss', means the 'art of discussion'. The democratic city-state offered unlimited opportunities for discussion in the assembly and the law-courts, and there arose a new type of philosopher, the sophist, a professional teacher who imparted to his pupils a general education with special attention to public speaking and debate, Thomson (1961) pages 317-8.

As the Greek dialectic emerged out of the totalising thought of tribal society, the focal point of its development became the *polis*, which combined a growing market economy and the extensive use of slave labour. Compared with cities elsewhere in the ancient world, the classical Greek *polis* was relatively open, and occasionally democratic, for free men, yet not for women. Such openness for the few usually accompanies the rivalry, uncertainty and complexity which results from the penetration of commodity production, and the introduction of coined money on a large scale. Commodity production arrived from the east, where, as we saw in the previous chapter, market social relations developed in certain areas. The following fragment from Ugarit suggests the existence of a certain level of commercial activity, accompanied by the usual contradictory fluctuations: "The price; high price; low price; poor price; fixed price; good price; stiff price; fair price; town price", quoted in Thomson (1961) page 106, who states that the development of the Greek *polis* was assisted when

By the end of the eighth century the Greeks had broken the Phoenician monopoly of the Aegean carrying trade and were challenging them in the Levant...since the Black Sea was closed to the Phoenicians...their trade with that region was conducted through the Ionians as intermediaries...it seems likely that one of the main incentives to colonisation, Phoenician and Greek alike, was the quest for slaves, who were bought up from kidnappers in backward regions, where their value was low, corresponding to the low level of production, and then transported to the main industrial centres, where their value was correspondingly high", pages 184 and 188.

As well as commercial change, there was at first modest technological development, which included the introduction of sheep-shears, the rotary corn grinding quern, wine-presses and the crane. However, as we shall see, the increasing use of slave labour held back further technological progress. For the merchant class, and increasingly for all other classes, "Money-making had ceased to be a means to an end and become an end in itself; and to this process there is no limit", Thomson page 195. From its beginnings on the west coast of Asia Minor, the market driven *polis* moved onto the Greek mainland. Engels described developments in Athens, whose people *were soon to learn how rapidly the product asserts its mastery over the producer when once exchange between individuals has begun and products have been transformed into commodities. With the coming of commodity production, individuals began to cultivate the soil on their own account, which soon led to individual ownership of the land. Money followed, the general commodity with which all others were exchangeable. When men invented money, they did not realise that they were again creating a new social power, the one general power before which the whole of society must bow. And it was this new power, suddenly sprung to life without the knowledge or will of its creators, which now, in the full brutality of its youth, gave the Athenians the full taste of its might,* quoted in Thomson page 196.

The contradictions inherent in both the introduction of commodity production and the existence of slavery soon became manifest in Athens, which became the site of intense class struggle. Thomson explains that for free Athenian men the democratic constitution was presented *as restoring to them in a new form those principles of tribal equality which their ancestors had enjoyed from time immemorial until they had been robbed of them under the landed aristocracy. This was an illusion...and it was the exact reverse of the reality. Being designed to facilitate the growth of commodity production, the democratic republic created the conditions in which the old tribal, gentile, traditional, patriarchal, personal relations were swept away. Such was the contradiction that forced itself on the consciousness of the Greeks...with the rapid growth of a monetary economy, its internal unity was negated by the struggle for the land and later by the antagonism between slave-owners and slaves. In each state the citizens were united against the slaves, yet divided against themselves by competition for the surplus value produced by slave labour...In Greek democracy the individual found himself 'freed' from all relations other than those determined by the mysterious nexus of commodity exchange....one of the basic factors determining the development of the city-state, was this internal contradiction between the old system of land-tenure and the new force of commodity production...By the democratic revolution*

of ancient Greece we mean the transfer of state power from the landed aristocracy to the new merchant class, pages 205-8.

Thomson explains that accumulation and concentration of wealth in the *polis* led to the development of a small leisured class, which proved vital to the history of thought in general and dialectics in particular. Despite the Leninist reflection metaphor, Thomson is astute in his summary: *At the same time, just as society was divided within itself, so also was the human consciousness. These internal contradictions, kept in constant motion by continuous developments in the forces of production, have been the driving force of history. Without them the polarisation of wealth necessary for the creation of a leisured class, free to devote itself to theoretical pursuits, such as the abstract sciences and philosophy, would have been impossible; yet, with this division between intellectual and manual labour, theory was continually being drawn apart from practice and so losing touch with reality. Without it there could have been no development of abstract thinking, and hence no philosophy or science; with it, the intuitive dialectics of primitive society, springing from the union between theory and practice, was continually being effaced by metaphysical mystifications...Such metaphysical views of the world are indeed a reflection of reality; but the reality which they reflect is not simply, as it purports to be, the world of nature; it embodies also the class structure of society as seen by the ruling class, which cannot maintain itself without fostering the illusion that its power is a product, not of history, but of nature. And yet, since the social relations, from which these illusions spring, are constantly changing and developing in response to developments in the productive forces, so all the intellectual products of class society also change and develop, driven forward by their internal contradictions. This is the secret historical logic which, unknown to the debaters, presided over the 'prolonged symposium' of Greek philosophy, page 340.*

The slavery debate

Well, I will tell you; for of my slaves

I hold you to be the most loyal...and the biggest thief.

Aristophanes, quoted in Fisher (1995) page 80.

In ancient society freedom was believed to consist in the conscious domination exercised by the slave-owner over the slave. His domination was socially complete, being limited only by the

physical capacities of the slave. This relation gave rise to teleological theories of the universe, which is set in motion and directed by a 'divine master' or 'first mover' without any physical effort on his part but simply by an act of will. There was no conception of natural law. Its place was taken by the idea of anánke or 'coercion', which connoted the relation between slave-owner and slave. In feudal society...the domination is no longer complete, being restricted by the feudal system of 'degrees', which include the serf as a full member of the community. Accordingly, the Aristotelian system, which was accepted as the foundation of medieval theology, was modified at certain points. In particular, the divine master operated within the self-imposed limits of his own appointed 'laws'. This marks the beginning of the concept of natural law. Thomson pages 342-3.

we must be careful not to exaggerate the development of ancient commodity production. Restricted as it was by slave labour, it was never strong enough to abolish entirely the old households, based on a self-sufficient natural economy, Thomson page 338.

There exists considerable debate between historians and economists concerning the extent of slavery in ancient Greece. As Greek philosophy, including dialectics, was developed by a leisured class on the backs of the labour of slaves, a consideration of this debate is crucial to a history of dialectics; it will also demonstrate the need to think dialectically, especially with respect the concept of internal contradiction. The various positions taken in the debate are inevitably connected to the social vantage points of the protagonists. The Eurocentric view adopted by the majority of scholars, including many Marxists, is central. To the extent that Greek achievements in philosophy, science, mathematics, art and democracy are shown to be based on the brutal exploitation of slaves, mostly notably in the Laurion silver mines where slaves were more or less worked to death, it obviously undermines Eurocentric notions of a benevolent ruling class. In an attempt to resolve an awkward contradiction at the core of European intellectual life, Eurocentrics often attempt to abolish one side of the freedom-slavery duality, by adopting a 'minimalist' view of slavery. They claim that slavery made only a marginal contribution, mainly in the production of commodities, to the surplus product which sustained the leisured class. Eurocentrics are keen to point out that slaves were used in clerical work, including banking and supervisory roles, in the police and military, as well as female domestic work. They also play down the routine beatings, and sexual exploitation, of these women, and the extent of slave-prostitution. In response to all this even the 'moderate' Fisher (1995) says:

On all but the first, extreme 'minimalist', views, Athens would still qualify as a 'slave-society', in that the major surplus for the élite came from slave labour; and the democracy depended on slavery since many of the rich allowed political and economic freedom to the peasants in part because they had their own slave-based wealth. The political implications of 'maximalist' views would be to extend the direct dependence on slavery to many, or even to very many, of the citizens. On these views the dependence of rich landowners on agricultural slaves is increased (the use of tenancies and hired labour becomes minimised, and many of the tenant-farmers would themselves use slaves); but more than this, many of the ordinary peasant-citizens were somewhat richer, as well as more self-confident, independent and leisured, because they owned slaves, page 46.

Despite his Hellenomaniac influences, Engels (1986) described ancient Greece as a *slave mode of production*, in which the slaves outnumbered the citizens by a factor of at least eighteen. He was in no doubt that the bulk of the surplus product appropriated by the wealthiest citizens, merchants and aristocrats of the *polis* was provided by slave labour. More recent scholarship suggests that this ratio of slaves is grossly overstated, that the role of slavery was more complex, and that the contribution of slaves to the surplus varied over time and place in ancient Greece. A useful summary of the scholarship is contained in Fisher, who begins by saying that "For classical Greece, unfortunately, we are almost totally denuded of evidence giving us access to the slaves' point of view, and most of our evidence indeed comes from the literate élite of the city states...Reliable statistics on the total numbers of slaves in any *polis* do not exist", pages v and 2.

Although there is still controversy on the extent of chattel slavery in agriculture, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that classical Athens was a society in which chattel slaves were responsible for the bulk of the surplus product. Aristotle, in Book 1 of the *Politics* describes chattel slaves as belonging completely to their master in the form of animate pieces of property, or tools, and yet he acknowledges that they are human beings. The contradiction meant that slaveowners asserted both their 'power and brutality' and 'more humane and warm relationships and the granting of some limited honour and the hope of freedom, at least to a minority of the slaves', Fisher page 6. The granting of some human contact to slaves was obviously a prerequisite to their reproduction by breeding, which was also assisted by the rape of female slaves by their owners. Apart from Epictetus, analysed later, there is little evidence of the views of slaves themselves. The American slave Frederick Douglass reveals the contradiction at the core of the social relations of slavery; as Fisher explains "it was on the rare occasions that slaves were treated with kindness and humanity

that they conceived the greatest desire to attain full freedom - not just to have a good master, but to have no master”, page 66.

In order to be aware of the material underpinning of the leisured class, which was able to develop abstract thought, we need to look at the complex reality of Greek slavery. Chattel slaves could be sold to new owners, they were regularly beaten and could be legally tortured at the owner’s whim. Newly acquired slaves had their personalities destroyed by a humiliating process which Fisher calls *social death*. As he points out, even the freeing of slaves, with or without a fee, was not as one-sidedly generous as it seemed: “Whatever the reasons for manumitting slaves, it is to be seen as a mechanism which served to strengthen, not to weaken, the institution of slavery as a whole, and was managed in ways which maximised the practical advantages to the slaveowners as well as increasing their reputation for decency and generosity”, page 70. Fisher also highlights the paradoxes inherent in more cultured slaves bringing up the children of wealthy Athenians, and educated slaves performing some of the occupations mentioned earlier. One is reminded of the contradiction which led to the restriction of child labour in Britain and elsewhere in the late 19th century; capital as a whole, in the form of the state, had to intervene to prevent depletion of the labour force through exploitation of child labour, which was in the interests of each individual firm.

Engels (1986) traced the development of slavery out of the primitive communism of tribal society. By Homeric times a male hereditary nobility, along with farmers and artisans, emerged and sought to reinforce its power by establishing city states which became the focus for slavery. They added to slave numbers by war booty, debt-bondage and those captured by pirates or traders, slaves at first being both non-Greek and coming from Greek tribes. Engels comments bitterly on this: “Children sold by their father - such was the first fruit of father right and monogamy! And if the bloodsucker was still not satisfied, he could sell the debtor himself as a slave. Thus the pleasant dawn of civilisation began for the Athenian people”, page 144.

Solon, an aristocrat who turned to trade, introduced a number of reforms in sixth century Athens which affected the nature of slavery. These reforms were a necessary compromise between the landowners and the merchants, who both feared that the economic ruin of the peasantry would cause them to revolt. The reforms standardised the coinage and reduced food prices, thus favouring merchants and artisans at the expense of the big landowners. Solon secured the status of male peasant-citizens by establishing a stricter duality between slave and free. He also cancelled peasant

debts, which reduced the incidence of debt-bondage that had grown with the expansion of coined money, so reducing the number of Greek slaves. The new citizens were distinguished from slaves or 'state-serfs', foreigners and women. They began to import their own slaves, who worked in the expanding commodity production sector, agriculture, and, worst of all, mining. Fisher quotes Finley's dialectical remark on these reforms as representing "the advance, hand in hand, of freedom *and* slavery", page 19. It can be compared with Critias' remark that Spartiates were "the most free of all the Greeks", as their state-serfs, or helots, were "the most enslaved", quoted on Fisher page 24. The helots were numerically larger than Spartan citizens, they were the conquered enemies of the Spartiates and likely at any moment to rise against them:

The more Spartan economic, social and political systems can be seen to be collapsing under a network of internal tensions and contradictions, the more remarkable becomes the discipline, organisation and subtlety with which her rulers, so few in number, maintained their physical and ideological grip over their serfs. The need was indeed great: the helots were the ultimate source of their wealth and power, and in all probability the chief cause of their having adopted for themselves such an austere, and ultimately unsustainable, life-style Fisher page 32.

The nearest thing to a rejection of slavery in ancient Greece was offered by Plato's philosophical opponents, the Sophists, especially Antiphon and Alcidamas, who questioned the prime assumption that slavery was *natural* and *just*. By contrast, leisured Athenians' attitudes towards slavery were, for reasons already explained, contradictory. Fisher claims that most free Greeks, apart from the major land and slave-owners, had no problem with *work per se*, only with working under the supervision of, or as Aristotle explained "for the benefit of", someone else, which was in effect to be reduced to 'slavery'. Sophists challenged the fixed polarities, free-slave, male-female, Greek-non-Greek and nature-social convention, which were propagated by the defenders of Greek aristocratic privilege, patriarchy and slavery, the most able advocates of which were Plato and Aristotle. They vainly tried to maintain the fixed nature of these dualities, despite the contradictory reality of these relationships. To note just three examples of these contradictions: both of these philosophers were obviously the result of a union between male and female parents, Aristotle was a Macedonian, rather than a Greek, whilst Epictetus was a slave and philosopher. Fisher notes that the fragments of Antiphon's work which survive give the impression that he thought that the acceptance of slavery, and other negative aspects of Greek life, makes Greeks "barbarians with

regard to each other”. If this interpretation is correct, it to some extent anticipates 18th century views on alienation.

Ellen Wood’s (1981) article *Marxism and Ancient Greece* presents a summary of her ‘minimalist’ views, which ignore the simultaneously brutal, yet paternalist, aspects of slavery. She begins by describing ancient Athens as “the society which first articulated the concept of democracy”, on page 3. However, this bland statement is made without any reference to the genesis of democracy in societies which long predate classical Athens. We have looked at the democracy of hunting and gathering societies, and could mention various forms of tribal assembly in the ancient world. Although few written records remain, all societies must theorise their social relationships to some degree, and many tribes fought to maintain their proto-democracy. Wood’s subsequent discussion of the development of Hellenomania fails to explore the relationship between the classics scholar and the dynamic of *contemporary* capitalist social relations. She also fails to provide more detail on the specific social struggles, which burgeoned the theory and practice of Athenian ‘democracy’. Whilst Wood makes useful criticisms of the cavalier claims of some Marxist writers, her ‘minimalist’ view of the extent and significance of Athenian slavery is inconsistent and unconvincing. As the following quotes show, Wood largely accepts the ‘maximalist’ thesis she claims to be challenging:

Even though it was the surplus labour of slaves more than that of poor but free producers that was appropriated by wealthy citizens, the opposition between rich and poor took a particular definite form in Athenian eyes as the opposition between citizens who were compelled to labour for a livelihood and citizens who, by virtue of their property, were able to live on the labour of others...It is true that Graeco-Roman civilisation employed, systematically and on a large scale, slaves who were clearly defined in law as chattels; and it would be absurd to deny the significance of this fact, pages 10-11.

Wood draws attention to vulgar Marxist claims about the ruin of free artisans and wage workers due to competition with slave artisans, but her static methodology fails to provide any analysis of these methods of production, nor of the contradictory relationships between the classes at the core of Athenian market relations. Similarly Wood’s use of the term “the ideological effects of slavery” fails to account for the contradictions in the theory and practice of slavery mentioned by Fisher. As we shall see these contradictions were to have a profound effect on Greek philosophy.

The thesis that slavery retarded the introduction of new technology, and a corresponding division of labour, is explained by Engels in the following quote:

Wherever slavery is the main form of production it turns labour into servile activity, consequently makes it dishonourable for freemen. Thus the way out of such a mode of production is barred. While on the other hand slavery is an impediment to more developed production, which urgently requires its removal. This contradiction spells the doom of all production based on slavery and of all communities based on it. A solution comes about in most cases through the forcible subjection of the deteriorating communities by other, stronger ones (Greece by Macedonia and later Rome). As long as these themselves have slavery as their foundation there is merely a shifting of the centre and a repetition of the process on a higher plane until (Rome) finally a people conquers that replaces slavery by another mode of production. Or slavery is abolished by compulsion or voluntarily, whereupon the former mode of production perishes and large-scale cultivation is displaced by small-peasant squatters, as in America. For that matter Greece too perished on account of slavery, Aristotle having already said that intercourse with slaves was demoralising the citizens, not to mention the fact that slavery makes work impossible for the latter. Engels (1947) pages 421-2, Engels' brackets.

Wood's challenge to this thesis is unconvincing, ignoring as she does the fact that, building on knowledge from the ancient world, Greek science made *theoretically possible* a level of technological development which was not actualised. Vulgar Marxists are prone to overstate the static nature of slave society; the Greek *polis* was marked by change within permanence. There was a more or less constant rivalry between the city states, which often broke out into armed conflict, whilst armed struggles broke out between Greece and her foreign rivals. Combined with an expanding market for commodity production, there was every incentive for technological innovation in both the means of production and final use values. However, as long as there was a means of expanding the supply of slave labour, either through importation or internal breeding, the need for technological innovation to increase the surplus was either reduced, or even completely negated.

In her article, Wood attacks the views of Perry Anderson, who replies in a review of Ste. Croix (1981). Anderson (1983) paraphrases Ste. Croix's definition of class as: "social relationships of exploitation, that secure the extraction of surplus labour from the immediate producers", page

61. In what is highly relevant to ancient Greece, he continues: “That exploitation may, or may not, generate a sense of collective unity and interest in the exploited - outcomes depending on the determinate possibilities for common action open to them. *Consciousness* of class identity, in other words, varies enormously in history - amongst the dominated classes (the dominant classes, by contrast, will always possess a strong measure of it).” page 61. Ste. Croix himself adds: “To adopt the very common conception of class struggle which refuses to regard it as such unless it includes *class consciousness* and *active political conflict* (as some Marxists do) is to water it down to the point where it virtually disappears in many situations. It is then possible to deny altogether the very existence of class struggle...between masters and slaves in antiquity, merely because...the exploited class...did not have any ‘class consciousness’ or take any political action in common except on very rare occasions and to a very limited degree. But this, I would say, makes nonsense not merely of *The Communist Manifesto* but of the greater part of Marx’s work”, page 57.

In answer to Wood’s ‘minimalist’ argument about *numbers* of slaves and free producers, Anderson says: “The *bulk* of the labour performed in Antiquity...may nearly always have been the work of non-slave producers - whether small-holders, artisans or dependent tenants. But the *surplus* labour that provided the income and wealth of the *dominant classes* was essentially extorted from slaves”, page 62. Positivist methodology, which takes account only of the facts of appearance, is oblivious to the internal class relationship which is reified in the surplus. With regard to Wood’s arguments on the extent of slave labour in agriculture, Anderson relies on Ste. Croix when he says:

“there is far less evidence for *any other form* of agrarian exploitation by the wealthy in these epochs. ‘How then’, he asks, ‘if not by slave labour, was the agricultural work done for the propertied class? How otherwise did that class derive its surplus?’ (p. 172). Not merely is there no sign empirically that wage-labour or leasing, the only alternatives, were more widespread, but logically neither, he demonstrates, could have yielded rates of exploitation comparable to the use of slave-labour in the conditions of the time”, page 62.

Whilst aware of the exploitation of small producers, Ste. Croix nevertheless concludes that it was slave-owners who on the basis of their exploitation “produced virtually all Greek art and literature and science and philosophy”, page 115. It is this key point which explains my extended consideration of slavery.

Also important is the position of women in ancient Greece. Ste. Croix claims that women as a whole must be regarded as a separate class because of their monopolisation of the reproduction function. Anderson refers to the contradictory position of women in ancient Greece, arguing that in terms of their different roles in the process of extracting surplus labour, women must be placed in different social classes according to their function. Female slaves could not be worked as long or to the same level of intensity if they were to reproduce the slave population at times when importation was difficult. Because of this, together with high infant and maternal death rates, says Ste. Croix “the inevitable consequence is that *the propertied class cannot maintain the same rate of profit from slave labour*, and, to prevent its standard of living from falling, is likely to be driven to *increase the rate of exploitation of the humbler free population*”, page 231.

Although Thomson (1961) combines vulgar Leninist formulations with fanciful speculations, he also provides a number of useful observations on the relationship between thought and social struggle. He notes that the increased use of slaves in commodity production eventually ruined so many free small producers that they “sank to the level of lumpen proletariat. In this way, being no longer a civil community of slave-owning landholders, the political form represented by the *polis* ceased to correspond to the social content. The result was that, after a period of destructive civil strife, the Greek city-states were subjugated by the Macedonians, who, just because of their backwardness, had preserved a free and prosperous peasantry”, Thomson page 16.

Meikle's thesis on Aristotle and political economy

Before studying the detail of the development of dialectics in ancient Greece, we can briefly consider the debate concerning Aristotle's contribution to theorising the political economy of the *polis*. Scott Meikle's book (1995) *Aristotle's Economic Thought* is a recent contribution which, despite flaws, is worthy of consideration. The author begins by observing that the “fewer than half a dozen pages” in Aristotle's work devoted to the subject is the first “analytical contribution to economics, and histories of economic thought usually begin with it”, page 1. Aristotle's thought was the “backbone” to Christian and Muslim economic theory, profoundly influencing neo-classical economics, and providing some of the metaphysical categories of Marx's political economy.

However, Meikle makes no mention of Aristotle's discussion on the role of women, nor of the attempt to eliminate the remnants of their power and subordinate them to the new forms of economic reproduction. In the context of the debate on *why* economic theory emerged in at this time in Greece, and the alleged link between this theory and the development of a market economy, Meikle's thesis is that, even at the time of Aristotle's writing, market social relations were *not* well developed in Greece. The author makes little mention of slavery, thereby failing to perceive the reason for Aristotle's inability to identify labour as the basis of exchange value. As Marx explained:

There was, however, an important fact which prevented Aristotle from seeing that to attribute value to commodities is merely a mode of expressing all labour as equal human labour, and consequently as labour of equal quality. Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had therefore for its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labour powers. The secret of the expression of value, namely, that all kinds of labour are equal and equivalent because and so far as they are human labour in general, cannot be deciphered until the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice. This however, is possible only in a society in which the great mass of the produce of labour takes the form of commodities, in which, consequently, the dominant relation between man and man is that of owners of commodities.

Marx, quoted on page 330 of Thomson.

Meikle's main thesis concerns the lack of market social relations, but most of the evidence, especially in Plato's dialogues, points to a high level of market penetration in classical Greece. For example in Plato's *Sophist* (1961) the Stranger says:

There is a distinction between the sale by a manufacturer of his own products and the business of exchanging what others have produced...Further, that department of exchange which amounts to about one half thereof, and is carried on within the city walls, is known as local retail trade...Contrasted with which we have mercantile trade, ie the buying of goods in one city for sale in another, page 167.

The anti-market polemic contained in Aristotle's economic writings, his discussion of fair exchange, the abuse of money and the distinction between use-value and exchange-value, make little sense, if, as Meikle claims, the market was peripheral in Athens. Meikle's second thesis is even less credible, for it suggests that Aristotle writes from no social or ideological vantage point, no "mindless prejudices of the Greek landowning class", page 126, but shows "typical detachment", page 127, in his discussion of the Greek economy. Apart from philosophical objections the claim of

objectivity for Aristotle, Meikle ignores the polemical nature of Aristotle's writings, in particular Book One of the *Politics* and the sections of the *Metaphysics* to be discussed later. His naïve view, which is compounded by the claim that "there is no reason to believe that there was any serious antagonism between the commercial class and the landed aristocracy", page 138, leads Meikle to refer to Aristotle's "strange defence of slavery", page 95. Had Meikle understood the nature of the social struggles in Athens, and Aristotle's place in them, he would not have found these views on slavery, women and the Sophists so "strange".

Dialectical thinking and the first Greek philosophers

all things are three, and there is nothing more or less than these three things. Of each one thing the excellence is threefold: intelligence and power and fortune, from Ion's treatise *Triad*, see Barnes page 223.

Even snow is black...there is a portion of everything in everything, Anaxagoras quoted in Thomson page 308.

All things were together. Then mind came and arranged them, Anaxagoras quoted in Barnes page 236.

(Leucippus) held that being no more exists than non-being, and both are equally causes of the things that come into being, see Barnes page 243.

Poverty in a democracy is preferable to what is called prosperity among tyrants - by as much as liberty is preferable to slavery, Democritus, quoted on page 277 of Barnes.

There are a number of collections of the remaining fragments of, and commentaries on, the pre-Socratic philosophers, but they are all to varying degrees written from a Eurocentric perspective. Barnes (1987) has written one of these collections. He begins by agreeing with Aristotle that these thinkers were essentially students of nature, or *phusikoi*, rather than society. They spent most of their time on questions concerning the order and adornment of the *kosmos* and its *arché*, or first principle, as well as its *logos*, or reasons for being the way it is. However, on occasions they did

consider society, positing interpenetration between the natural and the social, using one polarity as an analogy for the other.

Most of the early pre-Socratics did little more than codifying their tribal world view. However, other early Greek thinkers made public the secret knowledge of the ancient world, particularly that of the Egyptian priests, under whom many of them studied. Several of the Greek philosophers were initiated into Egyptian Mystery cults or were influenced by the derivative Greek Orphic or Eleusinian Mysteries. Yet others, like Pythagoras, set up their own cults modelled on the Egyptian Mysteries. Hall (1965) includes a hypothetical account of Plato's initiation, noting that these secret societies were the prototypes of present day Masonic lodges.

Barnes quotes from the seventh century poem *Theogony* by Hesiod which contains examples of the kind of tribal dialectics which were traditional for the early pre-Socratic philosophers:

*Love, who is fairest among the immortal gods,
loosener of limbs, by whom all gods and all men
find their thoughts and wise counsels overcome in their breasts.
From the Chasm came black Darkness and Night;
and from Night came Ether and Day
whom she conceived and bore after mingling in love with Darkness.
Earth bore first, equal to herself,
starry Heaven, to veil her all about
that there might be an eternal safe seat for the blessed gods.*

Barnes, page 57.

According to the conventional wisdom of Eurocentrism, Thales was the first *philosophical*, rather than religious or mythical, thinker and scientist. However, Lindsay in *Origins of Alchemy* (1970) points out that "Thales seems to have taken over the earlier Egyptian notion of a primitive cosmos of water, out of which the earth merely emerged in division to float like a raft", page 47. According to Herodotus, Thales' family originated from Phoenicia; other sources say that he learned geometry, astronomy, including the 365 day calendar, the theory of the immortal soul and other knowledge in Egypt. Thales believed in the animistic view that soul was responsible for *force*, such as that which causes magnets to move iron, an example he uses. His understanding of the antagonistic relationships of the newly developing market is clear in the anecdote, quoted on page 66 of Barnes,

which suggests that he “made a huge sum of money” by hiring the olive presses in anticipation of a bumper crop. We also learn of his social values in the story that “he thanked Fortune...that I am a man and not a woman...that I am a Greek and not a foreigner”, quoted on page 67 of Barnes.

Thales' pupil Anaximander reveals the Milesian dialectical view in his assertion that the principle, *arché*, of nature consists of the infinite which manifests itself as an endless cycle of generation and destruction. Opposites, according to Thomson's commentary on Anaximander, “encroach periodically on one another and so lose their identity by becoming reabsorbed into the undifferentiated form of matter out of which they emerged. This is what he means when he says that they ‘render satisfaction to one another for their wrongdoing according to the order of time’...The idea of change as a cyclical process carries with it the implication that the subject of it returns repeatedly to the state from which it started and hence to that extent remains unchanged”, pages 162-3. Such a cyclical philosophy is an idealisation of the social relations of the cyclical time of an agricultural society, but one giving way to new social tensions. Anaximander, claims Thomson, thinks anthropomorphically when he explicitly links nature and society: these opposites “render satisfaction to one another for their wrongdoing according to the order of time”. This, according to Thomson, is a case of applying the natural cycle to that of the situation at the time of Solon's reforms in which “The rich encroach upon the poor until they impoverish themselves by ever reaching after more; the poor revolt and rob the rich, only to suffer the same fate in their turn”, page 231. Thomson adds the point that the cyclical view is also an idealisation of Anaximander's, and Solon's, forlorn hope for the contending classes to restrain their contradictory aims and so avoid their mutual ruin. The Milesian Anaximenes also adopted a dialectical cosmology, since he believed in the *arché* of infinite moving air, which changes its form as it condenses and rarefies. The third century Christian Hippolytus summarises Anaximenes' cosmology: “Thus the most important factors in coming into being are opposites - hot and cold”, Barnes page 77.

The Pythagoreans

Pythagoras is said by Eurocentrics to have invented deductive reasoning whilst developing his mathematical theorems. Were this claim to be true, which it is not, it would be crucial to the history of logic. The merchant, philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras of Samos, who kept slaves but held liberal views about their treatment, was probably initiated into the Mysteries during his stay in Egypt. Pythagoras also visited Mesopotamia, where mathematical reasoning was, according to

some sources, very advanced. He may have gone as far as Persia and India, learning from the Magi, Brahmins and others. Chinese mathematical reasoning was very advanced around 500BC, however, no ancient source claims that Pythagoras visited there. Diop (1991) challenges the Eurocentric view that Greeks, like Pythagoras and Archimedes, invented symbolic notation and algebraic manipulation, whilst the Egyptians and Babylonians merely used “empirical formulas”. This claim was never made by the Greeks nor any ancient commentator; indeed they acknowledged that Greeks learned from the ancients. Although many Egyptian mathematical papyri were lost, Diop claims that the *Rhind* and *Moscow* papyri show clear evidence that the Egyptians must have known and performed operations on symbolic formulae according to the rules of algebraic and geometrical inference. Diop states that only this would explain why the practical exercises in these papyri, and Egyptian architecture, were so rigorous.. The famous ‘theorem of Pythagoras’ was actually invented by the Egyptians, who gave it a dialectical interpretation because, according to Plutarch: “The vertical side symbolises the male, the base the female, and the hypotenuse the progeny of the two”, quoted in Diop page 272.

According to Isocrates, Pythagoras was the first person to introduce philosophy into Greece. He seems to have formed a secret society, similar to that of the Egyptian Mystery cults, on his move to Croton in southern Italy. Polybius says that: “Pythagoreans practised no ordinary silence and their esoteric views were not divulged to ordinary men”, quoted in Barnes page 202. Like Plato and others, Pythagoras adopted Egyptian ideas on ethics, the soul, geometry and a universal harmony based on numerology. Strathern (1997) notes that the kind of logic used in the mathematical deductions which Pythagoras *may*, his contributions are disputed, have done took place “almost two centuries before its ‘invention’ by Aristotle”, page 9. For Pythagoras the number ten represented perfection, and, crucially for the history of dialectical thought, his system listed ten pairs of terms which were treated as fixed oppositions. These oppositions were central to the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and have remained important to most philosophers to the present day. Aristotle tells us that Pythagoras’

principles are ten in number, and come in co-ordinate pairs: limit - infinite, odd - even, one - quantity, right - left, male - female, resting - moving, straight - crooked, light - darkness, good - bad, square - oblong, quoted in Barnes page 209.

From what he admits is “tenuous evidence”, Thomson speculates that these dualities represent “antagonistic classes” and that Pythagoreanism is the world view of the emerging merchant class,

with its need for numbers. The doctrine of the mean as a fusion of two opposites, which was used by both Plato and Aristotle, may well originate from Egypt via Pythagoras and is taken, by Thomson, to be a final resolution, “concord”, or “blending”, of the struggle between the landed aristocracy and the peasantry, mediated by the merchants. Thomson notes the views of Theognis of Megara who “denounced the effect of money in blending the opposites, the nobles and the commoners, which, as a nobleman, he wished to keep apart”, page 272. Lindsay, in his discussion on the relationship between “social and intellectual positions”, similarly claims that Pythagorean views on “proportion and law”, which seem to have been important to their esoteric doctrines, can be linked to their political struggle as merchants and artisans sandwiched between the aristocracy and plebeians. Hence their credo: “Labour is good: pleasures of every sort are bad”, Iamblichus, quoted on page 204 of Barnes. In contrast with Pythagoras’ ten dualities, Alcmaeon of Croton, Aristotle tells us, believed in haphazard pairs “such as black and white, sweet and bitter, good and bad, great and small”, Barnes page 90. Alcmaeon reveals something of the social tensions of his time in the saying attributed to him: “it is easier to be on your guard against an enemy than against a friend”, Barnes page 92.

Xenophanes of Colophon in Ionia was a travelling poet-philosopher and critic of Pythagoras, who is said to have been Parmenides’ teacher. Though Xenophanes’ views on being and non-being are static and can be subsumed under the study of Parmenides, he took tribal dialectical thought about animals, humans and gods and developed it, in a way which anticipates Feuerbach, by claiming that different races depict god in their own image. He is reported to have said:

*But if cows and horses or lions had hands
or could draw with their hands and make the things men can make,
then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses,
cows like cows, and they would make their bodies
similar in shape to those which each had themselves.*

Quoted in Barnes, page 95.

The dialectic of Heraclitus and Empedocles

Heraclitus says that the universe is divisible and indivisible, generated and ungenerated, mortal and immortal, Word and Eternity, Father and Son, God and Justice, Hippolytus, quoted in Barnes, page 102.

..the things that exist are fitted together by the transformation of opposites...All things come about through opposition, and the universe flows like a river...the treatise is not about nature but about politics and that the remarks on nature are there by way of illustrations, Diogenes Laertius summarising the views of Heraclitus, Barnes pages 106-8.

It is not an accident, therefore, that the term 'dialectics' was invented for the study of the ideas in which the external world is reflected rather than for the study of the external world itself, Thomson, page 320, breaking with Leninist orthodoxy on dialectical thought.

Heraclitus of Ephesus, in Asia Minor, was in his prime around 500BC and, according to Diogenes Laertius, resigned his kingship in favour of his brother. Thomson states that he was, like Plato, an anti-democrat who had been initiated into one of the Mystery cults. His view that the basis of being is perpetual movement represents, says Thomson, an idealisation of the struggle between the three major classes of the Greek world of his time: "if Heraclitus excels Pythagoras in his grasp of dialectics, this too must be ascribed to his class position. As one opposed to democracy, he was quicker to discern its internal contradictions, by which it was destined to be destroyed, and so was enabled to perceive the truth that only conflict, motion, change are absolute", page 282. In most of the summary histories of dialectics presented by Leninists, because of remarks made by Hegel and Marx, Heraclitus is incorrectly treated as if he was the only thinker of any consequence in the ancient world. Heraclitus' dialectical method, explains Thomson, is like that used by the playwrights Aeschylus and Sophocles. Heraclitus writes in a way in which *words and clauses are abruptly counterposed so as to lay bare the contradictions in the ideas which they convey. The effect, as described by Plato, is like a series of volleys from a band of archers. In a highly inflected language like Greek such a style is necessarily accompanied by constant rhymes and assonances, and to these Heraclitus adds the use of puns - a universal characteristic of primitive speech, designed to invest it with a magical or mystical significance,* Thomson page 132.

Heraclitus uses the four elements of tribal dialectics, and singles out fire as crucial because of its obvious dynamic properties. Similarly he links mortals and immortals, as illustrated in the following chiasmus: "Immortals are mortals, mortals immortals: living their death, dying their life", Barnes page 104. Heraclitus continues the tribal dialectical tradition of explaining being from the interplay

of opposites: “There would be no attunement without high and low notes nor any animals without male and female both of which are opposites”, quoted in Williams (1989) page 21. Heraclitus goes beyond this to explain how a human artefact such as a bow whose “function is death” utilises identity and difference: “They do not comprehend how, in differing, it agrees with itself - a backward turning connection, like that of a bow and lyre”, Barnes pages 102 and 115. The significance of slavery to Heraclitus is clear in the following: “War is father of all, king of all: some it shows as gods, some as men; some it makes slaves, some free”. In this quote it is apparent that for Heraclitus slavery is not natural, as it was for Aristotle, but the result of war and therefore social.

Heraclitus refers to the opposition between immediately observable phenomena and more essential relationships in the following translations of fragments: “The hidden attunement is better than the obvious one”, Williams page 21; “Unapparent connection is better than apparent....nature likes to hide itself” Barnes pages 102 and 112. These fragments could be applied either to nature or to society, where it is an anticipation of Adam Smith's invisible hand analogy used to describe civil society in 18th century Scotland. Williams points to the Heraclitean dialectic and asks:

But is not Heraclitus here pointing at the dynamic nature of any society in which no rules and institutions can be taken as entirely fixed and fast, and in which the pattern is not set by what is commonly agreed but rather what is controversial and under dispute?...Without doubt for Heraclitus conflict is not only part of society, it is its vital element, page 29.

To emphasise his point, Williams refers to a letter by Marx quoting the following fragment which links a natural phenomenon to the newly developing market economy: “All things are requital for fire, and fire for all things, as goods for gold as gold for goods”, Williams page 28. A more general social comment is the following: “One should know that war is common, that justice is strife, that all things come about in accordance with strife and with what must be”, quoted in Barnes page 114. This fragment is further evidence for the claim that Heraclitus uses nature as an analogy for the social. In this context Thomson argues that much of the language of natural science, such as ‘scientific law’, is composed of metaphor derived from social relations. Although Plotinus tells us that Heraclitus failed to make his argument clear when he said that “it is weariness for the same to labour and be ruled”, quoted in Barnes page 117, clearly Heraclitus is referring to social contradictions. The same could be said for “most are at odds with that with which they constantly

associate - the account which governs the universe - and that what they meet with every day seems foreign to them”, in Marcus Aurelius, quoted in Barnes page 126.

Heraclitus seems to be anticipating the theory of internal relations, that is that opposites are not arbitrary fixed dualities but are organically linked, when he speaks of day and night, and beginning and end, as one. He continues: “Sickness makes health sweet and good, hunger plenty, weariness rest”, Barnes page 109. He applies this idea to craft working when he says: “The path of the carding-combs, is straight and crooked”, Barnes page 103. Similarly he speaks of up and down, and the pure and the polluted, being one and the same, explaining the latter example in terms of different vantage points, a technique made explicit in the following fragment: “The sea is most pure and most polluted water; for fish, drinkable and life-preserving; for men, undrinkable and death-dealing”, quoted in Barnes page 104. Perhaps the most profound of Heraclitus’ fragments are the various versions of the river analogies which explain permanence, or identity, within change and change within permanence:

On those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow...We step and do not step into the same rivers, we are and we are not, quoted in Barnes, page 117.

Empedocles, from Sicily, was a wealthy supporter of democracy. In his book *On Nature* he took the tribal theory of the four elements and had them “working in a system of opposites, love and strife, attraction and repulsion...Empedocles sought to carry this sort of outlook into a detailed application of the struggles between the two conflicting forces, with necessity as the sum of their activity, together with the ‘contract’ that ties them together as they build and destroy - each of them limited by the effects of the other”, Lindsay page 2. In contrast to the Eleatics, in his *Physics* Empedocles explains what is, or being, as composed of an interpenetration, or vortex, between the one and the many: “At one time they grew to be one alone from being many, and at another they grew apart again to be many from being one...And these never cease their continual change, now coming together by Love all into one, now again all being carried apart by the hatred of Strife...to that extent they come into being and have no lasting life; but insofar as they never cease their continual change, to that extent they exist forever”, quoted in Barnes, page 166.

Thomson claims that Empedocles’ use of the opposition between love and strife, which is related to Orphic myth, highlights the differing ideologies of the aristocracy and the masses. For the aristocracy “Love was a dangerous thing, because it implied desire, ambition, discontent. The

tendency of aristocratic thought was to divide, to keep things apart...In the philosophy of Empedocles, who had much in common with the Orphics, it is Love that brings the world together, Strife that forces it apart, and the world is best when Love overcomes Strife. The tendency of popular thought was to unite", page 238. Whilst this explanation is possible, Thomson fails to clarify which class is thinking the "popular thought" which Empedocles supports against the thinking of the aristocracy.

Lindsay (1970) claims that the early Greek dialectical thought used by Heraclitus and Empedocles synthesised the opposition between the rising market economy and "tribal society as it grew aware of its unity with, and its difference from, nature...(and) a society in which individualism with all its small local conflicts, endlessly splitting up the general interest, had been born - above all, a society in which money systems and mathematics had arrived as the expression of the new divisive forces inside the overriding unity, the strongly surviving tribal elements", page 3. However, on the same page Lindsay states that there was both a positive and a negative side to this dialectic of opposites:

The emphasis put by Heraclitus and Empedocles on opposites or contraries continues in Greek thought, and is the source of both its greatest strengths and its greatest weaknesses. Aristotle, who makes the principle an insistent feature of his physics, declares that the theme was shared by Greek rational physics from the outset. Indeed it could hardly have been otherwise; for in this matter the Greeks were carrying on the deepest and most pervasive element in primitive tribal thinking, where the dual organisation of society is reflected in every aspect of the way in which the universe and natural phenomena are regarded.

Lindsay claims that this immanent dialectic was too metaphysical or formal, too one-sidedly concerned with the qualitative at the expense of the quantitative; observation, measurement and experiment were almost totally neglected. Similarly, it possessed little or no sense of the *internal relations* of entities. Paradoxically, it was too atomistic and concerned with the external relationship between self-subsisting entities; it sharply delineated identity and difference, form and matter. Lindsay attempts an explanation of such thought in the transition from tribal society to a class structure increasingly based on oppositions between atomic individuals, or human beings reduced to heterogeneous 'things'. The internal relations of the new mode of production, consisting of slavery, wage labour and labour performed by artisans, were not understood and therefore could not be theorised. Lindsay claims that the abstract dialectical thought used by these Greek proto-scientists, together with the productivity of the slave, or human machine, profoundly reduced both

the likelihood of, and the need for, science to be applied to the development of machines. He states that slavery:

proceeded, not out of any purely economic motivation or need, but out of the total human situation, which in turn it affected and modified. The concept of the 'atomic individual' as the free man (with all its virtues of liberating men from ancient constraints) had as its reverse side the concept of the man-thing or man-mechanism; the new sense of freedom was dogged all the time by an increasing sense of fate or necessity. Hence the dilemma of Greek thought, which on the one hand was richly aware of the patterns of change and on the other hand could not advance from dialectical generalisations to applications in mechanics and dynamics, page 8.

Using a similar argument Thomson points out that the Sumerians and Egyptians “who in technical inventiveness far surpassed the Greeks”, were not responsible for a new world outlook: “The early Greek philosophers owed what was new in their work...to the new developments in the relations of production”, page 172.

Parmenides, Zeno and the law of contradiction

Parmenides was born into the landowning class of Elea, a part of southern Italy settled by Greeks, and was probably an initiate of the Pythagorean Mystery cult. A substantial part of a poem of his survives, giving us a summary of his philosophy. His views represent the antithesis of the dialectic of Heraclitus, and were the first attempt to codify a rigid duality between being and non-being. For Parmenides these terms corresponded with truth and falsehood, from which is derived the law of non-contradiction. Thomson states that, even though this view fails to distinguish between the empirical and the intelligible, it is a landmark because “for the first time in the history of western thought, we have to deal with a *metaphysical* conception of being, contradicting the *dialectical* conception of becoming, which prevailed hitherto without question”, page 292. “That contradictories are not true together he shows in the verses in which he finds fault with those who identify opposites”, is a paraphrase by Barnes of the explanation of these views by the ancient commentator Simplicus, Barnes page 133. Parmenides’ poem says that being, or what is, “is ungenerated and indestructible, whole, of one kind and unwavering, and complete”, quoted in Barnes page 134, and this contrasts absolutely with non-being, or that which “is not and must not be - this I say to you is a trail devoid of all knowledge...For you could not recognise that which is not (for it is not to be done), nor could you mention it”, quoted on page 132 of Barnes.

Despite her Eurocentric stance, Nye (1990) analyses Parmenides' logic within its social context, Greece in the sixth-century BC. She stresses the need to examine Parmenides' synthesis between poetry, which represents emotion or desire, and logic, which invokes abstract entities and passionless reason:

Desire puts him on the road to logic, leads him through and past the ordinary concerns of human life in a quest or search for something loved and lost, dreamt of but never attained... 'What is' is the perfected object of desire, a being that can be approached without any of the confusion, fear, indecision, or ambivalence with which we approach the physical objects of desire. Parmenides has found an object of love eternally faithful, beyond birth or death, held tightly in the embrace of logical necessity, pages 10 and 13.

By a careful textual analysis of her translation of Parmenides' poem, Nye draws attention to its link with the struggle by the ruling men of the newly established *polis*, who want to eliminate the vestiges of the traditional freedoms, power and status enjoyed by women in earlier Greek tribal society. She seeks a philosophical basis for homosexuality, common amongst the Greek aristocracy, although she fails to link the orientation to social class: "If a female mixes with a male, the result is both female and not female, impossible by the rule of non-contradiction... 'What is' cannot come to be out of what is not, like a man from a woman, nor can it be destroyed. In logic the way of nonbeing is kept separate from being, just as what is male is kept separate from what is not male. In logic there is no intercourse of being with nonbeing, and therefore no disappointment or ambiguity, only the perfect fidelity of the unmoveable, unchangeable, perfect 'well-roundedness' of truth", pages 14 and 16.

This interpretation is supported by the text of the poem, but, because of her particular social vantage point, Nye fails to see that the laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle sublimate a fixed dualism which corresponds to the Greek social formations. These include the desire by Parmenides to distinguish between freemen and freewomen on the one hand, and slaves on the other. Plato and Aristotle similarly use the laws in a way which suggests a link with the need to reinforce both the male-female and freeman-slave distinction, which they allege is natural. But they also distinguish between law and chaos, Greek and barbarian, Gods and humans, and between the true philosopher, who in practice must have the amount of leisure only available to the landowning class, and the Sophist, who is aligned with the rising merchant-trader. Each of these oppositions

corresponds to the contradiction between the authentic timeless positivity of being and the transient and illusory negativity of non-being posited by Parmenides. This opposition was to prove highly important to the eventual codification of deductive thought, especially in the Aristotelian syllogism and 19th and 20th century formal logic.

One of Parmenides' disciples was Melissus, who used prose, rather than poetry, to explain his teacher's views, which were to be the beginning of the development of the reified metaphysics of 19th century positivism. Simplicius summarises the philosophy of Melissus as "perceptible objects do not exist but seem to exist", and explains further this influential philosophy in the following extracts from a fragment:

But it is not possible for anything to come into being either from the non-existent (not even something else which is nothing, let alone something actually existent) or from the existent (for in that case it would have existed all along and would not come into being). What exists, therefore, has not come into being. Therefore it has always existed. Nor will what exists be destroyed. For what exists can change neither into the non-existent (the natural scientists agree on this) nor into the existent (for in that case it would still remain and not be destroyed). Therefore it always has existed and will exist...nothing that exists is empty; for what is empty is nothing, and what is nothing cannot exist. So what exists does not move - for it has nowhere to move to if nothing is empty. Nor can it contract into itself. For in that case it would be both rarer and denser than itself, and that is impossible...But what is hot seems to us to become cold, and what is cold hot, and what is hard soft, and what is soft hard, and living things seem to die and to come into being from what is not alive, and all these things seem to change...So it is clear that we do not see correctly, and that those many things do not correctly seem to exist. For they would not change if they were true, but each would be as it seemed to be; for nothing is stronger than what is true. And if they changed, what exists would have perished and what does not exist would have come into being. In this way, then, if there exist many things, they must be such as the one is, all quotes are from Barnes, pages 144-9.

Zeno of Elea, another disciple of Parmenides, was said by Aristotle, and others, to have invented the dialogue form later referred to by Plato as the dialectic. Although Kerferd (1981) rejects this claim, it may be true since in the following extract from Plato's *Parmenides* Zeno, referring to his book of arguments, says: "My book attacks those who say that several things exist, aiming to show that their hypothesis, that several things exist, leads to even more ridiculous results, if you examine

it properly, than the hypothesis that only one thing exists”, quoted in Barnes page 152. Zeno believed that true being is composed of an eternal unchanging indivisible one, and evidence of a reality composed of many changing entities is false. He used a number of negative dialectical arguments to try to demonstrate this simple truth, including the argument from dichotomy, which claims that if we repeatedly subdivide the One, this leads either to an infinity of indivisible minima, or a dissolution into nothingness. In either case, argues Zeno, the result is absurd, and therefore the opposite argument, that the One is indivisible, is true. Most famously Zeno argues that motion is not possible, because to assume that it does leads to absurdity. He does not see motion as continuous sensuous movement, but as abstract discrete jumps from one point to another, points which again can be subdivided into ever smaller units. Therefore, explains Aristotle, “the slowest thing will never be caught when running by the fastest. For the pursuer must first reach the point from which the pursued set out, so that the slower must always be ahead of it. This is the same argument as the dichotomy”, quoted in Barnes page 155.

The debate on the Sophists

The best way of combining one's own interests and the demands of justice is to act according to justice when there are witnesses but according to nature when one is alone and unobserved, Antiphon, quoted in Wheelwright (1966), page 259.

*Being is unrecognisable unless it manages to seem, and seeming is feeble unless it manages to be. Gorgias, who wrote a book entitled *Concerning Not-Being*, quoted in Wheelwright page 249.*

The “antilogical” method of the Sophists clearly reproduced in theory the upheavals and conflicts of their time...Immoderate consumption of food and drink is bad for the immoderate consumer, but good for the tradesman. Victory at the games is good for the victor, but bad for the defeated. The issue of the Peloponnesian War was good for the Lacedaemonians, but bad for the Athenians...This line of argumentation reinforced the idea that social institutions are not unalterable but can and should be remodelled with the changing requirements of mankind, Novack (1965) pages 185 and 187.

(According to Antiphon) dreams were signs which required interpretation not literal application, and indeed often could mean the opposite of what they appeared to say, Kerferd page 51.

One of the later meanings of the verb dialegesthai from which dialectic was derived was 'to discuss by the method of question and answer', Kerferd page 59.

Plato and Aristotle constantly attack the methods used by their philosophical rivals, in particular the Megarians and the Sophists. The Megarians, none of whose work survives, were disciples of Euclides, a contemporary of Socrates, who, according to Aristotle, constantly broke the law of contradiction by insisting that a thing can both be and not be.

The Sophists, of whom we know the names of about 26, were at their peak between 460 and 380BC. Aristotle claimed in his lost dialogue, *Sophistes*, that Zeno invented the dialectic, although at other times his view was that the patent belonged to either Socrates, Plato or himself. In this section it will be argued that it was the Sophists who synthesised the dialectical method, or *methods*, in its more developed form, which reached its zenith in the writings of Hegel. Only a few fragments of unreliable and largely hostile commentaries on the writings of Protagoras and the other Sophists survive. Therefore my source for this claim is the persuasive evidence and argument contained in *The Sophistic Movement* by G.B.Kerferd (1981). Whilst Kerferd makes only passing references to the contradictions in the social totality of fifth century Greece, he amasses a large amount of evidence concerning the Sophists, who he claims are “condemned to a kind of half-life between pre-Socratics on the one hand and Plato and Aristotle on the other, they seem to wander for ever like lost souls”, page 1.

As hinted at in this quote, we rely heavily on Plato for our knowledge of the Sophists. However, Kerferd fails to tell us *why* Plato, Aristotle and other members of the Athenian land- and slave-owning class, who were also initiates to the Mysteries, misrepresented the views of, and were so hostile to, this group of professional thinkers and speakers who “offered an expensive product invaluable to those seeking a career in politics and public life generally”, page 17. The Sophists were radical humanists and agnostics, who anticipated the bourgeois theory of the social contract. They viewed a human being as a complex of social and natural factors, from which they drew the conclusion that slavery was not natural. The medically inclined Sophist-humanists took something from anthropocentric tribal dialectics by insisting on knowing who and what a person is before treating him or her medically. Sophists came from all parts of the Greek world, attracted to the

affluence, social mobility and relatively open intellectual atmosphere of 5th century Athens. These polymaths charged fees for access to their knowledge and skills, being the intellectual equivalents of the new merchants and money-lenders who had challenged the economic and political power of the nobility. With their rhetorical skills and their dialectical multi-sided philosophy, corresponding to the contradictions and complexity of the social relations of commodity production, these new intellectual entrepreneurs challenged the right of the land- and slave-owners to monopolise the world of thought. Not surprisingly the Sophists generated a good deal of hostility amongst the Athenian nobility. They were punished with imprisonment or exile, having their books burned and, in the case of Socrates, if we accept him as a Sophist, death.

Kerferd fails to explain the persistence of the negative attitude towards the Sophists amongst contemporary classics scholars at Oxford, Cambridge and other leading academic institutions around the world. These tenured intellectuals present philosophy in a frozen ahistorical way, which abstracts from its roots in the social struggles of the societies in which it developed. Therefore they tend to gravitate towards the timeless motionless world of the Platonic forms, waxing lyrically on the “genius” of Plato, in sharp contrast to the base Sophists, with their vulgar eristic, who are presented as charlatans and sellers of ‘virtue’. Kerferd claims that Hegel’s attempt to rehabilitate the Sophists, crucial though it was, was only half-hearted. Hegel’s view was dominated by his Hellenomania. His intention was to create a schematic genesis for the development of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, so that “paradoxically the traditional view of the sophists would seem thus to have been confirmed”, Kerferd page 8. More positive is Untersteiner’s dialectical view that “the sophists agree in an anti-idealistic concreteness which does not tread the ways of scepticism, but rather those of a realism and a phenomenism which do not confine reality within a single dogmatic scheme, but allow it to rage in all its contradictions, in all its tragic intensity”, quoted on page 11 of Kerferd.

Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, credits Zeno, and not Protagoras, with the use of the art of *antilogiké*, or antilogic, “which consist in causing the same thing to be seen by the same people now as possessing one predicate and now as possessing the opposite or contradictory predicate, so e.g. just and unjust, an art ‘which is not confined to law courts and to public speeches, but which applies as a single art (if it is an art) to whatever things men speak about’”, Kerferd page 63. Protagoras, who according to Philostratus studied under the Persian Magi, rejected Parmenides’ view that a negative statement had no meaning because it did not refer to anything. In a famous fragment, which is

similar to Jainian logic and anticipates the Hegelian dialectic, he points out that the antilogos could be full of meaning when it asserted the non-existence of a thing: “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are as to how they are, and of things that are not as to how they are not”, quoted on page 85 of Kerferd. However, Protagoras also said that all *logiai* did not have the same ontological status, since the *orthos logos* was superior to alternatives, a view to be compared the idea that “opposing arguments could be expressed by a single speaker, as it were *within* a single complex argument”, Kerferd page 84. Perhaps Protagoras is merely pointing out the truism that different statements have different ontological statuses as descriptions of reality seen from particular vantage points. Kerferd’s discussion of the problem is notable for its lack of awareness of Hegel’s views, which similarly applies to his discussion of the Sophist Gorgias’ views on the concept of nothing, an important idea in Indian dialectics.

That Protagoras, the leading Sophist, wrote on logic and methods of debate is clear from the titles of two of his, now lost, books: *Art of Eristic* and two volumes on *Antilogiai*. There is also an anonymous Sophistic text, the *Dissoi Logoi*, which opens with “twofold arguments are spoken in Greece by those who philosophise, concerning the good and the bad”. Kerferd explains that the text’s “basic structure clearly consists in setting up opposing arguments about the identity or non-identity of apparently opposite moral and philosophic terms such as good and bad, true and false...this is an application of the method of Protagoras”, page 54. The “method of Protagoras”, which Kerferd claims is really the method of the whole of the Sophist movement, consisted of “1. a formal expository style whether lecture or text-book, 2. the verbal exchange of a small informal discussion group, and 3. the antithetical formulation of public positions and the setting of party lines”, page 34. This was the source of the dialectical method, which was to be used in Plato’s dialogues and analysed in the *Topics* of Aristotle.

Wheelwright (1966) explains how the Sophists’ claim that “wisdom can be taught” was a direct challenge to the aristocratic view that wisdom was a natural virtue inherited by the few. He goes on to quote the following fragment, alleged to be by Protagoras, which reveals the Sophist’s view of matter. It makes the point, which represents a massive leap forward in philosophy, that observation is active and has a subjective aspect:

All matter is in a state of flux. A fluctuating thing may retain its shape, however, because the changes may be such that the additions compensate for the losses. It is our sense impressions of the thing that get modified, because affected by age and other bodily conditions...There are

intelligible principles inherent in the matter of every phenomenon; because matter is essentially the sum of all the seemings that it has for any and all persons, page 239.

For the Sophists, particularly Protagoras, it would seem that antilogic involves two or more statements or arguments each of which are contradictory, yet which may all be true. The reason for each logos being in contradiction with the others, yet all being simultaneously true, is that for Protagoras each logos represents the different vantage point of each participant in the dialogue. It is clear that the Sophists went some way towards relating each of these vantage points to the social whole, an intellectual feat which, if taken far enough, involved a thoroughgoing analysis of the real contradictions at the core of the Athenian social totality. However Plato, as advocate of the privileges of the nobility, constantly sniped at the Sophists, taking refuge in the mystical theory of a timeless motionless essence beyond the empirical world. His ideological stance prevented him from seeing the profound insight of the Sophistic antilogic.

As Mailloux (1995) demonstrates, there has been a radical re-examination and rehabilitation of the Sophists by some contemporary philosophers, in particular neo-pragmatists, post-modernists and some literary theorists. Mailloux quotes a source, Schiller's *Humanism*, which argues that Protagoras' aphorism "Man is the measure of all things" *urges Science to discover how Man may measure, and by what devices make concordant his measures with those of his fellow men, page 8.* Therefore different individuals and groups experience reality from different vantage points. Rejecting Plato's charge of "relativism", Schiller claims that Protagoras attempts to transcend any one vantage point by synthesizing and reconciling opposing vantage points. He asks: *what...is the transition from subjective truth for the individual to objective truth for all?*, and continues: *For if there is a mass of subjective judgments varying in value, there must ensue a selection of the more valuable and serviceable, which will, in consequence, survive and constitute growing bodies of objective truth, shared and agreed upon by practically all.* In the same passage Schiller adds an important point about the social context of 'objectivity': *it is still possible to observe how society establishes an 'objective' order by coercing or cajoling those who are inclined to divergent judgments in moral or aesthetic matters...all assertions, however 'contradictory', that are really made...are true, in the sense that there really is something in the situation which provokes different minds so to formulate their various estimates., pages 11-12.* Fish explicitly links the Protagorean view to the socio-economic dimension when he asks: *Does might make right? In a sense the answer I must give is yes, since in the absence of a perspective independent of*

interpretation some interpretive perspective will always rule by virtue of having won out over its competitors, quoted on page 17 of Mailloux. We can only speculate as to the extent of Protagoras' understanding of the totalising aspect of his theory. What is clear is that, despite its alleged tendency to relativism, the Sophists' massive contribution to dialectical thought was to prove invaluable for Hegel and Marx over two thousand years later.

Plato and the dialectic

Logic is here, for the first time in literature, contemplated as an autonomous science with the task of ascertaining the supreme principles of affirmative and negative propositions (the combinations and 'separations'), Taylor commenting on Plato's method of division in typically Eurocentric fashion, quoted in Thomson page 320.

(Dialectic is the way in which thought engages in an) inward dialogue within the soul...the zigzag of contemplative ascent to the divine realm, Chadwick (1990) on Plato's view of the dialectic, page 109.

Socrates explains, the rhetorician looks like a slave, the philosopher like a free man...What Plato's Socrates never foregrounds, of course, is that a great number of human beings must forego any hope of leisure so that the philosophical, ennobled few can get their theories straight, Jasper Neel, quoted in Mailloux pages 74-5.

Because Plato's known biographical details are few and often repeated, I shall confine myself to extracts from the *Parmenides* and *Philebus* dialogues. The *Parmenides*, which was much praised by Hegel, features an end section, which may have been a later addition to the original text, on the dialectic of the One and the many begins:

If it is one, the one would not be many, would it?

No, how could it?

Then there cannot be a part of it nor can it be a whole.

Why?

A part is surely part of a whole.

Yes.

But what is the whole? Wouldn't that from which no part is missing be a whole?

Certainly.

In both cases, then, the one would be composed of parts, both if it is a whole and if it has parts.

Necessarily.

So in both cases the one would thus be many rather than one.

True.

Yet it must be not many but one.

It must.

Therefore, if the one is to be one, it will neither be a whole nor have parts,

Plato (1996), pages 141-2.

This open knock-about, yet highly abstract, style continues to generate contradictions when the topic moves to the being and non-being of the One:

Then because it moves, the one is also altered.

Yes.

And yet, because it in no way moves, it could in no way be altered.

No, it couldn't.

So insofar as the one that is not moves, it is altered, but insofar as it doesn't move, it is not altered.

No it isn't.

Therefore the one, if it is not, is both altered and not altered,

page 171.

The *Philebus* is more measured and careful about the use of dialectic. Still on the tribal dialectical theme of the One and the many we read the following anticipation of Leibniz's monad:

For it is a remarkable thing to say that many are one, and one is many; a person who suggests either of these things may encounter opposition.

That isn't what I mean, Protarchus: the remarkable instances of one-and-many that you have mentioned are commonplace: almost everyone agrees nowadays that there is no need to concern oneself with things like that

...

First, whether we ought to believe in the real existence of monads of this sort; secondly, how we are to conceive that each of them, being always one and the same and subject neither to generation nor destruction, nevertheless is, to begin with, most assuredly this single unity and yet

subsequently comes to be in the infinite number of things that come into being – an identical unity being thus found simultaneously in unity and plurality,

Plato (1972) pages 19- 20

Plato anticipates Hegel's discussion of mediation in the following passage:

There then; that is how the gods, as I told you, have committed to us the task of enquiry, of learning, and of teaching one another; but your clever modern man, while making his One (or his Many, as the case may be) more quickly or more slowly than is proper, when he has got his One proceeds to his unlimited number straight away, allowing the intermediates to escape him; whereas it is the recognition of those intermediates that makes all the difference between a philosophical and a contentious discussion,

page 24.

The secondary literature on Plato's dialectic

Most mainstream philosophers and classics scholars fail to explain the relationship between Plato's thought and his socio-political environment. The Leninist Thomson (1961) overcomes the deficiency by summarising the social basis of Plato's philosophy as follows:

As a member of the old nobility who was bitterly opposed to democracy, Plato could see no hope for society except to undo all that had been done by the merchant class and re-establish the rule of the landed aristocracy: in other words, to restore the past in such a way that it will remain henceforth as it was and suffer no further change. His whole philosophy is inspired by this antipathy to change, and hence it is not surprising that he felt such an admiration for the Egyptian priesthood, which had succeeded so well in laying a dead hand on the cultural development of their people...his philosophy expresses the reactionary outlook of a selfish oligarchy clinging blindly to its privileges at a time when their social and economic basis was crumbling away. It is a philosophy founded on the denial of motion and change and hence of life itself, page 328.

By contrast less perceptive Greek scholars, such as Plochman (1973), discuss Plato's philosophy in general, and his dialectic in particular, in the context of the duality between the phenomenal world of becoming and the unchanging being of the Forms. Plochman makes a modest attempt at showing how Plato improves on Parmenides by claiming that the main function of Plato's dialectic is to reveal the relationship between being and becoming. However, Plochman acknowledges that

Plato's dialectic is highly elusive, and can be defined in several different ways, running from the simple to the complex. At its most basic the Platonic dialectic is merely the kind of structured conversation in which truth, as opposed to opinion, is sought after, a method used in many of the dialogues. There is also the question and answer form, in which Socrates usually defeats his opponents by the use of elenchus, which represents a more intensive form of dialectic as compared with mere conversation. Dialectic is thus developed into an art, but to the extent that its practitioner becomes skilled, he or she is skilled in the most important of all the arts, because dialectic is the art of arts. The dialectic is also the art of enumeration, although this is defined widely and includes division and subdivision, but it "cannot proceed independently of experience", page 110. To the extent that dialectic is a contest to win truth, it aims at victory by the use of statement, or logos, proof and refutation. Also the dialectic is self-revelation, since in the elenchus *the character of the men...is revealed, sometimes in spite of the speaker's desire to keep himself in the background...there can be no bitterness, no jealousy, in dialectic; the attack looks to reform of a person's thinking and character, not to his discomfiture*, page 111-12.

Plochman explains the dialectical technique of impersonation, where dialogues are "all dotted with allusions to remarks others would have made, proofs they would have given", page 112. How authentic these "remarks" and "proofs" of other philosophers, especially the Sophists, are in the hands of Plato is a matter of conjecture, but Plochman fails to discuss this contentious point. Next he cites the dialectical technique of definition, which attempts to explain the *being* of a thing or idea. The technique relies on the fact that a speaker's definition is rarely true or adequate, and therefore "becomes a target for refutation...Socrates himself rarely offers definitions but instead elicits them from his struggling respondents", pages 113-4. Plochman says that on a higher level dialectics ceased to be a mere art, stating that to the extent that it seeks for the timeless being of the Forms, it takes on scientific status: "dialectic emerges as the common structure of inquiry binding together and finding the shared principles and formulas applicable to all or at least to many of the disciplines", page 114. He reaffirms the point that dialectic is "the search for and demonstration of truth", page 115, leading to the final stage in which dialectic becomes pure being.

Plochman contrasts Plato's various approaches to the dialectic with other modes of thought including common opinion, rhetoric, science and history. In the case of science he concludes that *dialectic must be placed above the sciences, for it includes their methods, it grasps the principles and conclusions of all of them, it sets them in their proper relationships on to another, and it*

justifies them by tracing their hypotheses back to some unitary principle. Dialectic says in effect that to have any fully explicit scientific knowledge one must transcend it and see it whole, which implies seeing it from outside, which in turn implies the seeing of all of reality, pages 119-20.

Plochman says of history that “as a recounting of individual events (it) must be invested with a kind of structure by a dialectician - some principle of separation or of collection of elements in a list. Otherwise history, for all its show, can teach us nothing, can give us no real knowledge, can lead us to no forms helping us to comprehend human life and action”, page 120. Doubtless Lindsay (1970) would agree, because he notes Plato’s view that the duality symmetry-asymmetry is the basis of historical movement and development. He draws attention to the triadic relationship captured in Plato’s claim that “It is not possible for two things to be joined together without a third”, page 16. Thomson (1961) attempts to locate Plato’s thought socially when he argues that the cave allegory in the *Republic*, with the rich ontological contradictions which arise from it, is an idealisation of slavery in ancient Greece, in particular the historical reality of those working in the silver mines at Laurion. However, this interpretation may be challenged since the purpose of the allegory is to release the cave dwellers from ignorance and captivity, which is in sharp contradiction to Plato’s attitude to slavery.

The phenomenological philosopher Karl Jaspers (1962), who engages in hagiography and lacks an understanding of the social totality of ancient Greece, comments on Plato’s dialectic:

the prevailing knowledge which supposes it has the thing it knows, is congealed, incomplete, and unjustifiably complacent. It can acquire its truth only by bursting its limits, by understanding itself in the knowledge of nonknowledge...it is one with the reality of the knower...What makes this knowledge that is always in motion so hard to grasp is that the thinking it demands is something more than the object thinking implied in the prevailing concept of knowledge...It is a process which went on throughout Plato’s life, taking on ever new forms, endlessly intensive, but making no definite progress...This is what Goethe meant when he said that Plato ‘dispels all objects with his method’, page 17.

Jaspers reminds us that Plato constantly refers to the world of sense perception, which he also calls becoming, finite knowledge or mere appearances; a world the in which “contradictions clash like flint and steel”, page 36. In the manner of Parmenides the early Plato contrasts becoming with the

unchanging harmonious essential world of the Forms, which is pure being. However, Jaspers explains, “being and nonbeing are not ultimate opposites but are both present at every step though in different ways...*Matter* or *space* is radically nonbeing, but with its potential becoming or coming-into-being, it is also an eternal potentiality toward being”, page 38. Without realising the social significance of the analogy, Jaspers tells us that for Plato finite knowledge is “as a slave that lets itself be dragged about by all other states of mind”, page 20, although here, as elsewhere, Jaspers provides no source for Plato’s words. Speaking of both the One and self-awareness, Jaspers says “Self-awareness seeks to be one with itself. ‘I would rather that my lyre should be inharmonious...or that the whole world should be at odds with me, and oppose me, rather than that I, being one, should be at odds with myself and contradict myself’”, page 18, again no source is given.

With reference to the Platonic dialogue form, Jaspers states that it is no *accident that nearly all Plato’s works are in dialogue form. Form and substance are concomitant...When Plato’s philosophy is expounded undialectically as a doctrine, it becomes scarcely recognizable... ‘For in regard to the value of what I say, I can call on only one witness, my adversary with whom I am carrying on the discussion; as to the crowd, I ignore it’...Dialogue...makes it possible to attain agreement step by step, to arrive at logically compelling conclusions in the precision of question and answer, in the battle of alternatives...The demonstration of contradictions brings thinking into its natural movement. Its consequence in the dialogue form is that the thought content is suspended in the movement of thinking. While in an exposition thoughts are set forth as definitive, in dialogue the truth develops spontaneously, in the course of the exchange, as an objective reality that is not contained in any one position*, pages 22-6.

Of the Platonic dialectic, Jaspers says that “Dialectic and philosophy are the same, the one stressing the method, the other the content”, page 35. However, he oversimplifies Plato’s view of contradiction when he states that opposites “are mutually exclusive. For no opposite can ‘ever be or become its own opposite, but either it passes away or perishes in the change’”, page 36. On the same page Jaspers acknowledges that even for the world of the Forms “what at first ends in perplexity becomes dialectically a means of speculation by which, with the contradictions themselves, one penetrates to deeper knowledge. Contradiction is the dynamic factor... It ‘draws

the dialectician toward Being...The chief test of a natural gift for dialectic...(is) the ability to see the connections of things' (*Republic*)". Jaspers continues, dialectic "is an indirect method. If man attempted to see being itself, he must fear to be blinded, as the eyes are blinded when they look into the sun. Thus it is necessary to operate by way of concepts (*logoi*) and to investigate the essence of things with their help...The Dialectic of mere oppositions remains aporetic and serves only as an indicator. Dialectic by intermediate concepts elucidates the divergent by establishing an intervening bond (*demos*). Hence the importance of the 'between' (*metaxy*), whereby separates are joined, whereby the one is present in the other or has a share in it. Hence also the importance of the moment (*exaiphnês*), of the transition, the junction of past and future in the present. Hence also the being of what is not, which in a certain way has being", page 37. Jaspers ends with a colourful description of the Platonic dialectic: "Philosophical thinking is an upward-tending erotic enthusiasm. But in it we experience our vacillations, our ups and downs. We fall, we fail, we live anew in the movement of love. For love is like philosophy, a being-between. It is having and not having. It fulfils in nonattainment", page 45.

The views of Plochman and Jaspers, are uncritical, occasionally fawning and always asocial. In the same vein Robinson (1953) makes some observations on Plato's oral, as opposed to written, dialectical method. He begins by acknowledging the importance of going through all the relevant stages and the related necessity of taking the "long road" in Plato's dialectic, both of which are important in Hegel's dialectical method. However, he incorrectly claims that, though Plato borrowed elements from earlier thinkers like Socrates and Zeno, "the notion of dialectic which we find in Plato's dialogues was invented by Plato himself...Plato does not introduce the idea of dialectic until those dialogues in which he is no longer merely reproducing his master...Plato represents the dialectical method as familiar to Socrates' hearers and yet as requiring to be explained to them", pages 88-90. He points out that Plato's attitude towards the dialectic cools in his late works, the *Laws* and the *Philebus*. Referring to Plato's lack of precision in defining his dialectical method, Robinson says Plato has a "strong tendency...to mean 'the ideal method, whatever it may be'...In the same way, he applied the abusive terms 'eristic' and 'sophistry' on every occasion to whatever seemed to him at that time the danger most to be avoided" page 70. More fundamentally, Robinson argues that Plato's oral dialectic recorded in the dialogues, which is aimed primarily at the discovery of knowledge, requires that the writer, speaking through the leader of the dialogue, has already "done a great deal of private discovery beforehand", page 81. In response, Robinson points out that for Plato "A process analogous to that of questioning others

goes on in the mind of the single inquirer”, page 83. Whilst this is one-sidedly true, Nye (1990) is persuasive in arguing that the bulk of the dialogues could be written in treatise form, since the second speaker spends most of his words in appropriate assent and dissent to the questions of the leader. The *Sophist* is typical of Plato’s dialectical form, rarely does the second speaker have anything of significance to say.

Kerferd argues that an understanding of Plato’s view of antilogic, requires us to contrast the term with *eristic*, which comes from *eris* meaning strife. Eristic means “seeking victory in argument” or “success in debate or at least the appearance of such success”; and the art of eristic “provides appropriate means and devices for so doing. Concern for truth is not a necessary part of the art...Fallacies of any kind, verbal ambiguities, long and irrelevant monologues may all on occasion succeed in reducing an opponent to silence and so be appropriate tools of eristic”, Kerferd page 62. In contrast to Plato’s totally condemnatory description of eristic, his explanation of antilogic is rather less hostile; it is an inferior form of dialectic which “proceeds on the basis of (merely) verbal contradictions...though well-meant, it is inadequate to the task in hand”, page 64. Antilogic consists of

opposing one logos to another logos, or in discovering or drawing attention to the presence of such an opposition in an argument or in a thing or state of affairs...when used in argument it constitutes a specific and fairly definite technique, namely that of proceeding from a given logos, say the position adopted by an opponent, to the establishment of a contrary or contradictory logos in such a way that the opponent must either accept both logoi, or at least abandon his first position, Kerferd, page 63.

The term *elenchus*, sometimes referred to as negative dialectic, is the name given to the mutual cross examination used in Plato’s dialogues. It consists of the refutation of a logos, arrived at in answer to a question such as *what is courage?*, either by showing the logos to lead to self-contradiction, or by showing its antilogos to be true, in either case leading to a state of *aporia* or uncertainty, which can in turn lead to misology, or hatred of arguments. Elenchus could involve merely the use of antilogos or dialectic itself; either way Plato argues that its use must be restricted to the mature philosopher, otherwise it can “destroy respect for traditional authority”, page 64. Kerferd links the Platonic dialectic, as opposed to antilogic, to the method of establishing truth by reference to the Forms, but fails to acknowledge Plato’s apparent rejection of the theory in the *Parmenides*, which contrasts sharply with Plato’s early view that only be reference to the Forms

can dialogue overcome aporia and misology. These are inevitable because the empirical world is in constant flux and is therefore inherently contradictory. In contrast, Robinson's remarks on eristic and elenchus are more searching:

The reason why Plato constantly pillories eristic and distinguishes it from dialectic is that in truth his own dialectic very closely resembled eristic; and this in turn is because his own dialectic, though having a constructive purpose, incorporates the destructive Socratic elenchus. The Socratic elenchus looks to the ordinary observer like nothing so much as an obstinate determination to disprove whatever the other party says, pages 85-6.

Nye's analysis of Plato's *Sophist* is similarly searching, beginning with Plato's challenge to Parmenides' assertion that nothing can be said about "what is not", or any negative proposition, because it has no being. As a result of this, Nye says, "what is" is both everything and nothing: "If there is no nonbeing, there is no falsity and so no way to distinguish proper philosophical thought from improper, truthful statement from false...All rational thought is threatened if no predication except simple identity is possible. Then we are only able to 'speak of a good as a good , and of a man as a man'...Such a formalism was certainly not acceptable to those, like Socrates and Plato, who were critical of Athenian democracy", pages 24-5. In order to negate this Parmenidean impasse, the dialogue concludes that "to say that something is 'not something else' is not to say that it 'is not' but that it is 'different' from something else in some respect...once difference is recognised, false thinking and false talk can be identified", page 27. Crucial to Nye's argument is the point that, having transcended the Parmenidean empty identity of "what is", Plato uses the process of division, bolstered by deprecating metaphors and analogies, to create a new set of fixed oppositions which correspond to his immediate polemical need to refute the Sophists:

The goodness or badness of the Sophist is no longer an issue for discussion but constitutes the semantic structure of a language...If the truth of a metaphor always leaves space for another metaphor and another truth, the Stranger's logical reconstruction does not. It stands alone, as the only correct and true way to view the Sophist...it forbids the respondent to speak or think outside the categories in which these evaluations have been made. Argument is terminated. It is not surprising that such a technique would be welcome to someone of Plato's political views...Logical division makes possible a conversation in which one party is in complete control of the discussion. The Stranger leaves Theaetetus no opening for any substantive contribution to the discussion. At the same time the illusion is created of an exchange of views...Logic has restructured communication. The laws of noncontradiction and excluded middle force Theaetetus's replies and

also his thought, into approved channels. They structure a drill by which Theaetetus can learn, not to think, but to repeat what his teacher says. The logic of the Stranger's argument is the exercise of that authority. It is logical necessity itself that denies Theaetetus's futile attempts at response, Nye, pages 29, 30, 33 and 34.

Nye further explains that the Stranger, wishing to rise above the base logic of the Sophist, introduces a higher level of logical abstraction, or metalogic, i.e. a logic of logic, giving the appearance that the philosopher-aristocrat is not "in the same 'world', or on the same 'level'", page 35, as the Sophist huckster. All of which is inseparable from Plato's hatred for the Sophists, the itinerant salesmen of philosophy, who threaten to undermine the slave-owners' monopoly of intellectual life. Nye's work on Plato is more perceptive than that of the other commentators because she accepts the need to locate his work *socially*. At their best Plato's dialectical dialogues pave the way for the brilliant formulations of the neo-Platonists and mystics. However, as Nye points out, much of the one-sided dialogue is merely an anticipation of Aristotle's 'laws of thought', being sublimations of the social oppositions of fourth century Athens.

Aristotle's dialectic

According to Aristotle the principle of subordination is a universal law of nature. As the slave is to his master, so the wife is to her husband, body to soul, matter to mind, the universe to God. His First Mover is an ideological expression of the ownership of the homogeneous slave labour embodied in ancient commodity production, Thomson page 308.

The notion of dialectic is a piece of intellectual currency which, like the currency of cash, is more used than understood. Most of those who use it are aware of it only in its more recent cultural forms and are unfamiliar with its historical genesis among the philosophers of ancient Greece, Evans (1977), page ix.

The Aristotelians...treated logic almost in our modern sense as a practical instrument for the discovery of fallacies in argument on any subject, an indispensable tool for every department of human inquiry...concerned with propositions and syllogisms and terms, Chadwick (1990) page 108.

(Aristotle) must still be credited with having progressed from (Platonic) dialectics to (Aristotelian) syllogistics, Chroust, quoted in Evans page 2.

Dialectic must be distinguished from the sciences in that it does not work with any set view of reality. In this it is opposed both to the many special sciences and the universal science of ontology...But what marks off the sciences from dialectic is that they embody a correct view of reality, Evans page 5. Aristotle himself makes the same point: “conversation is actually more liable to error than solitary thought; science does not proceed by question and answer, and dialectic, which does so proceed as its name implies, is not the method of science”, quoted in Robinson, page 84.

The quotes from Evans are typical of Aristotelian scholars who seek to justify the bifurcation of dialectic and formal logic. According to Smith, in Barnes (1995), Aristotle claimed “that he was the first to conceive of a systematic treatment of correct inference itself. As such Aristotle was the founder of logic”, page 27. This kind of claim is a commonplace amongst cloistered scholars, analytical philosophers, formal logicians and Eurocentrics. Whilst the claim about Aristotle’s first “systematic treatment” is true, for surviving texts, the idea that he was “the founder of logic” is false. Whilst Aristotle’s various texts on logic are the earliest surviving substantial works on logic and inference, it is the case that, prior to Aristotle, philosophers like Plato and Protagoras, thought and wrote about logic, and the influence of both on Aristotle is clear. Moreover, Diop (1991) points out that Egyptian priest-mathematicians were using inference in arithmetic, geometry and trigonometry long before Aristotle. As Aristotle himself says in the *Metaphysics*: “In Egypt mathematical sciences first commenced, for there the nation of priests had leisure”. As we have seen, Jainians, and perhaps other Indian philosophers, were thinking about logic at least as early as 500BC. It is not credible to claim that Aristotle “was the founder logic” and inference *ex nihilo*. He codified ancient logical methods, learned from a variety of sources, such as Egyptian libraries, and adapted them to the needs of the dominant Athenian classes.

Despite Evans’ contrary opinion, Aristotle’s view of the relationship between logic and dialectics is ambivalent. He uses his categories in an attempt to reconcile different social relationships, and inevitably his imperatives correspond, with varying degrees of clarity, to the social and economic changes which took place over the course of his life. In the first book of

the *Topics* Aristotle's distinction between logic and dialectics is unclear, although Smith points out that some commentators interpret Aristotle as saying that dialectic may be useful for establishing "indemonstrable first principles of sciences" page 62. Smith argues that, for Aristotle, dialectics is a practical competitive form of argument suitable for success in forensic settings, i.e. law courts or tribunals where the asking of questions, opinions and contested assumptions are the norm. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's purpose is more complex; he rejects dialectics, along with 'sophistical' arguments, in favour of inference based on the law of contradiction. Smith states that Aristotle's six works on logic, or *demonstration* as he called it, later became known as the *Organon*, which was the paradigm for thinkers in the post-Hellenic era, particularly those living in medieval Christian and Islamic societies. As we see in the next chapter, in Christian Europe, William of Ockham separated religious thought, with its Platonic dialectical aspects, from what came to be formal logic, based on Aristotle's 'laws of thought'.

Aristotle's philosophical method of deduction (*sullogismos*), which Smith defines as "discourse that tries to prove a point" page 29, is used as a means of demonstrating *valid* inference. Arguments are constructed by Aristotle in a standard format in which a conclusion follows logically, or necessarily, from a premise or 'prior' proposition, or as Aristotle argues *two* premises. Smith notes that the three part Aristotelian form is, confusingly, specifically called the syllogism by modern logicians, whereas Aristotle's word *sullogismos* is a more general term for deduction, as opposed to induction (*epagôgê*), which he discusses less rigorously. Aristotle builds his logical system by contrasting concrete terms, like Socrates, and universal terms, like man. He contrasts subjects and their predicates, along with affirmative propositions and their negations, and demonstrates degrees of contradiction by contrasting 'determinations of quantity', as Smith calls them, such as 'every', 'some' and 'no'. Thus, for example, "Every A is B" is in sharp contradiction with "Some A is not B", whereas "Some A is B" is clearly not in contradiction with "Some A is not B". Because "Every A is B" and "No A is B" could both be false, according to Aristotle, these two propositions are in a less contradictory relationship. The use of these symbols creates problems, because symbols themselves generate intractable difficulties when used to represent more complex propositions. Symbols increase the tension between what is 'logical', according to *sullogismos*, and the range and complexity of relationships in the real world. There is also tension between the formal rules and logical systems based on different methods or levels of abstraction. Smith shows how problems multiply as propositions become more complex, for example in modal

statements which concern necessity and possibility, when “matters become very difficult indeed”. Likewise in claims about the future such as the famous “There will be a sea battle tomorrow”. However, Smith, in common with most formal logicians, fails to understand the real reasons for the “difficulties”, quotes on pages 45-6.

Book Γ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1956) is a key text for a study of the history of dialectical thought, being the first surviving discussion of the relationship between formal and dialectical logic. Aristotle, following Plato, muddies the water by linking dialectic and “sophistic”, saying: *Dialecticians and sophists alike imitate the philosopher: sophistic is wisdom in appearance only, while dialectic discusses all subjects simply because they pertain to philosophy. Dialectic and sophistic are both concerned with the same class of things as is philosophy; but philosophy differs from dialectic in its method, and from sophistic in the life-purpose which it implies. Dialectic is merely critical, while philosophy claims positive knowledge; sophistic is what appears to be philosophy, but in fact is nothing of the kind*, pages 118-9.

Aristotle is in difficulty with his views on logic, caught between, on one hand, his knowledge of the pre-Socratic philosophers’ views on the changing and contradictory aspects of being, and, on the other, the need to form a set of rules for winning arguments between members of the Athenian élite. However, the latter need is mediated by the attempt to preserve the static aristocratic life in face of the radical changes caused by the rise of the market. His logic, with its fixed rules, represents the sublimated needs of a class in crisis trying to achieve security in a world marked by change and uncertainty. Thus, after acknowledging that “Nearly all thinkers agree that existing things are compounded of contraries; at any rate all of them name contraries as first principles”, page 119, he goes on to reject the corollary of this: “It is impossible for anyone to believe - though some say Heraclitus did - that the same thing can *be* and *not be*”, page 123. He then states that “everyone in argument relies upon this ultimate law, on which all others rest”, page 124. This constitutes the famous law of contradiction.

Many leading philosophers reject this law, but Aristotle asks rhetorically “what principle...is more self-evident than the law of contradiction?”, page 125. In support of his law, Aristotle uses seven proofs to demonstrate that the law holds in argument. However, Aristotle is merely adopting a fixed set of rules which abstract from the fundamental nature of being as

“compounded of contraries”. His rules assume that being is composed of atomised, static self-subsisting entities. He ‘proves’ that, if these rules are broken, contradiction results, and following Plato’s method in the dialogues, he assumes that contradiction is equivalent to error. The seven ‘proofs’ demonstrate that, although aware of some of the philosophical problems of cognition, Aristotle fails to recognise the use of different levels and modes of abstraction. Each of these levels and modes may require their own logical system in order to make them appropriate to their relevant vantage point, theoretical needs or practical requirements.

Aristotle trivialised Protagoras’ anthropocentric insights on vantage points, claiming that Protagoras, along with the Megarians, was merely asserting that any arbitrary statement made by anyone is automatically true, so that practical decision-making is impossible. When he argues that “If only the sensible exists, then without animate beings there would be nothing at all”, page 138, he is misrepresenting Protagoras’ humanist view, which is that objects are always objects *for us*, *not* that they do not exist without a consciousness to be aware of them. Aristotle’s law of the excluded middle similarly fails to acknowledge ‘contraries’, so that, in the example he often uses of whiteness, he cannot see that even the ‘purest’ white contains elements of its opposite black, as well as the other colours of the spectrum. His statement of the law shows that for the purpose of stating the rules of logic he must abstract from his philosophical awareness that *change* is fundamental to being, because this would involve, for example, accepting that during dawn or dusk there is an intermediate, or *middle*, between day and night. His argument that “in the realm of numbers there will be a number which is neither odd nor even. But this is impossible”, page 143, cannot be treated as universal support for the law of the excluded middle, because it assumes what it is trying to prove. Aristotle similarly muddies the waters by referring to the contradictions which result from the Cretan liar paradoxes, since he fails to discuss *how* these paradoxes arise.

In an attempt to salvage his logic by adding the qualification of “at the same time” to these laws, Aristotle reveals that his abstraction from the movement of time, however small this movement may be, assumes that for the purposes of his logic natural and social being consists of a timeless instant of absolute identity. As Heraclitus’ river aphorism shows, for some purposes this identity abstraction is adequate, but for others it is not. Aristotle admits the existence of change, but insists that it

is a practically negligible part of the whole, and it would have been more reasonable to deny all change in the universe on the grounds that the greater part is unchanging, than to posit a state of universal flux because a mere fraction of the whole is subject to change...We must try to convince our opponents...that there is an unchanging reality. After all, those who deny the law of contradiction imply that all things are at rest rather than in motion; for if all things already possess all attributes, there remains nothing into which they can change, Aristotle (1956), page 137.

In the interests of defeating his 'eristic opponents', Aristotle retreats from his awareness of change as fundamental to being, purposely misrepresenting Anaxagoras' argument that there is "everything mixed in everything", and compounding that misrepresentation by the non-sequitur that this means that nothing can change.

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle notes the distinction between the object of cognition, the *fact*, and thought about the object as expressed in its *name*. He is conscious of the problem that particular names can refer to more than one object, and the subsequent discussion shows that, to save his logical rules from refutation, he has to assume that each name refers to a fact which is ultimately a *fixed essence*, rather than to an *accident* or contingent set of qualities. In positing these fixed essences, Aristotle abstracts from the problem of the complex relationship between thought and being, and substitutes instead the rigid dualism required to support his prototype of the correspondence theory of truth. Despite these weaknesses, Aristotle's profound philosophical understanding, which was a major influence on both Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*, still occasionally shines through in book Γ of the *Metaphysics*. An example of this is the statement: "Now the essence depends on quality, which is determinate, not on quantity which is indeterminate", page 148. Similarly a commentator on the *Metaphysics* states in Aristotelian fashion: "The physical sciences are defined as concerning objects that move; here the form cannot be abstracted from the matter without the subject ceasing to exist", Chadwick page 110.

Nye notes that Aristotle attacked Plato's dialectic, in particular his method of division which "can prove anything to anyone", proposing instead "a more practical study of the skilful combination of terms in statements to produce necessary conclusions", page 41. She notes

Aristotle's example of the two axioms: *All mules are barren* and *This animal is a mule*, and the necessary inference: *This animal is barren*. Although this is a simple paradigm for more complex examples, Nye says that the study of inference is important for Athenian "men intent on winning and preserving power, privilege, and wealth", page 43, who know little, and care less, about animal husbandry, noting that no "farmer would have use of it. The techniques described in the *Prior Analytics* assume a specific Athenian institution of elaborate, often artificial debate in which farmers, laborers, or workers were not involved", page 42. Aristotle's rules of inference were developed in the context of a social struggle in which the law courts and the Assembly became increasingly important:

*A city-state and its colonial empire in which the majority (slaves, foreigners, women, manual workers, artisans, conquered or dependent peoples) are ruled by a minority of propertied men required a new justice in the form of legislation written by men and adjudicated by men, legislation that defined offences, penalties and defenses. The courts provided an alternate, less destructive arena for the violent antagonistic contests for prestige and power between upper-class men that were the most distinctive feature of Greek culture and that in the close confines of the city-state were increasingly dangerous...In the new courts, success depended not on guilt or innocence, but on cleverness and dexterity in argument. Not only did each side have the right to present arguments, they also had the right to question and refute those who accused them...Juries awarded verdicts in the same way they might reward a particularly inventive if not too sportsmanlike wrestling hold. Justice...was a substitute for the ruthless, violent competition for plunder and power that dominated Hellenic culture and that is documented in the Homeric epics. Now a successful man would learn how to use the weapons of rhetoric as skillfully as he used his sword against barbarians or his limbs against rivals in the gymnasium...In the courts there were excuses, extenuations, exceptions, indulgences, and lesser penalties, to be argued and debated before a jury who would reward the most agile dialectician with success...In politics, speakers in the Assembly borrowed the new forensic techniques to show up their opponents. Teachers advertising their skills showed off their knowledge in staged dialectical debates. These practitioners and their clients were the clientele for whom Aristotle's *Topics* and *Prior Analytics* were written , Nye, pages 44, 45 and 46.*

In Aristotle's writings a tension exists between these techniques and the requirements of the *Prior Analytics* for a 'pure logic', which could eliminate the equivocality of real life and language, and so systematically detect fallacies. As an antithesis to establishing a democratic consensus, he sought to legitimate the rational mind of the 'natural' ruler: "Aristotle devised a mechanism for generating contradictions that would infallibly improve a disputant's performance", Nye, page 46. In distinguishing between mere truth and logical validity Aristotle helped the privileged Athenian who *when a charge was brought against him in the courts... would want to defend himself whether guilty or not. Therefore, in a dialectical argument truth was not in issue. The great merit of the concept of logical validity is that it takes this into account in a way that is impossible in ordinary communication...If they were able to forget the truth and concentrate only on the form of the argument, they were likely to be successful. By isolating syllogistic forms of argument, by substituting letters for statements that allowed them to be arranged in certain valid and invalid patterns, Aristotle's theory of the syllogism made possible this bracketing of the truth, and therefore could form the foundation of an education that prepared a man for success in public life...Trained in logic, graduates of Aristotle's Lyceum proceeded to posts in newly colonised areas, confident of their superiority and their ability to govern. Logic was a badge of office, a way to identify 'that one who can plan things with his mind' and is therefore 'the ruler by nature'(Politics I, 1; 1252a32-33). Women, slaves, workers, and conquered people, all those who did not participate in dialectical contests, were expected to accept the superior reasoning of their masters, Nye, pages 47-48.*

To end this section, we may remind ourselves that Aristotle's views dominated the medieval Christian and Muslim world. Gilchrist (1991) summarises Aristotle's view of nature, which was taken unchanged from Egyptian sources, as explained in the *Physics* which:

held sway in Europe until the new era of science dawned in the seventeenth century. He held that each element was composed of two qualities, there being four qualities in all - hot, dry, moist and cold. The element of air was hot and moist; fire was hot and dry; earth dry and cold; and water cold and moist. By changing a quality of each element, transformation became possible: by driving out the moisture from air, for instance, fire would result since the pair of qualities would now be those of fire, which was hot and dry, page 18.

Lindsay (1970) argues that, despite Aristotle's dialectical transformations, or union of opposites, which he applies to the four tribal elements, "what was changed was only the form; the underlying matter was always the same", page 16. In contrast, the Stoics, to who we now turn, re-introduced tribal ideas of power, *dynamis*, as the driving force of the transformation of the elements; they did this in a way which eventually led to some progress in alchemy, and later in chemistry.

The Stoics

In Greece itself, the Macedonians were opposed by the ruling clique in each city, who had a vested interest in maintaining the autonomy of these petty states. They succeeded because their expansionist policy provided the only means whereby the Greek propertied class of money-lending landowners could maintain their wealth and power against the pressure of poor freemen, who, afflicted by mass unemployment, 'went about as armed rovers, attached to no city, hiring themselves out to any state that needed fighting men, a constant menace to society', Thomson (1961) on the decline of the polis, which coincided with the development of the Stoic philosophy, page 329.

The Stoics' recommendation that slaves should be treated less harshly was consistent with later Roman imperial policy. In the early days of the Republic, when there was an abundant number of slaves from Rome's many conquests, efficient economy dictated that, slaves being cheap and replaceable, they be worked to death to spare the expense of their reproduction. Later, with fewer conquests and fewer slaves, a different imperial policy was required, Nye page 82 note 25.

If we reflect that the Cynic and Stoic teachers were mostly foreigners in Greece... Those who had been branded as natural slaves were now giving laws to philosophy, Stock (1908) page 105.

No evil can happen to a good man; contraries do not mix, Stock page 94.

Being and not being come round in endless succession for all save Him, into whom all being was resolved, and out of whom it emerged again, as from the vortex of some aeonian Maelstrom, Stock page 92

Although by the time Zeno the Stoic was born, Athens had become part of the huge Macedonian empire, the city still attracted philosophers because of the existence of the rival schools established by Plato, Aristotle and others. Whilst there, Zeno, whose contemporaries called him a Phoenician, probably joined a Mystery cult. He was influenced by followers of Heraclitus, and by Diogenes and the other Cynics, who were famous for their unusual behaviour; also by the Sceptics and by the Megarians, of whom Eubulides was known for his antithetical logic and his ability to generate paradoxes. Although none of their work survives, we know from later commentators that from these influences Zeno, and the later Stoic Chrysippus, developed two antithetical systems. These were, firstly a dialectical cosmology centred around the Heraclitean fire, and secondly a contrasting formal logic which, despite rejecting both Plato's dialectic of the Forms and Aristotle's syllogisms based on essential being, frequently generated logical paradoxes in the style of the Megarians.

Zeno's cosmology was based on an abstract theory of an interpenetrating dialectic of the active, a causal principle based on the Heraclitean *logos*, and the passive, which was matter or unqualified being. To these were added the four ancient elements, of which Heraclitus' fire was primary, and they were linked to the four qualities of matter: hot, cold, moist and dry. The Stoics were aware of the important dialectical concept of nothingness, or the void, which they defined as "absence of body", saying that "Place was compared to a vessel that was full, void to one that was empty, and space to the vast wine-cask", both quotes from Stock (1908) page 83.

Stoic logic was divided into rhetoric, the "knowledge of how to speak well in expository discourses", and dialectic, "the knowledge of how to argue rightly in matters of question and answer", Seneca, quoted on Stock page 18. Zeno compared "rhetoric to the palm and dialectic to the fist", page 18. Nye explains the social context of Stoic logic:

Stoic logic reorientated both logical theory and dialectical practice in the new context of world empire. The city-state had collapsed; no longer could its values or political integrity survive intact. No longer was there one superior Greek state which could legislate substantive

agreement on heavenly Forms or universal essences. Instead new kinds of logical constraints had to be invented consistent with the administration and repression of a plurality of peoples with differing values and customs, page 66.

Mindful of the divine *logos* of Heraclitus, the Stoic logicians turned to language itself, detached from substance and essence, as the key to truth. Zeno cut through the metaphysical categories of Aristotle and concluded that the world was composed only of “bodies, only physical beings in given states and relations, the objects formed at the first creation by God’s spermal logic in a free act of creation”, Nye page 67. Sandbach (1989) confirms this: “For the Stoics the only thing that ‘exists’ is the individual: the universal is nothing but a mental construct. Accordingly they use a logic that would treat statements about individual things”, page 96. Anticipating the structuralists, Zeno linked language and physical beings by the use of a triad: the sign, the meaning of the sign and the referent. His interest focused on assertive propositions, preferably couched in an algebraicised logical meta-language rather than a particular language, because the assertions could be adjudged to be either true or false, and amenable to truth function classification. Zeno realised that any syllogism could be converted into a conditional by adding an “if” to the axioms and a “then” to the conclusion. As Nye explains:

Men are rational animals;

Socrates is a man:

Therefore Socrates is rational.

becomes: If men are rational and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is rational. Page 68.

The effect of this “if...then...” system, later supplemented by “and” and “either/or”, was fundamental to the development of formal logic because it removed the specific relationship between the various terms, as explained by Aristotle in the *Prior Analytics*, and made the inferential relationship one between the propositions. Sandbach uses the *p* and *q* symbols to show five forms of inference based on the law of contradiction, allegedly used by Chrysippus. He adds that: “the Stoics made practical use of these syllogisms which, incidentally, have the advantage of accommodating verbs of all kinds, whereas the Aristotelian variety admits only the copula that joins a predicate to a subject”, page 98. It had the effect of streamlining the rules for inference in the kind of propositions which were typical of the dialectical

confrontations in the law courts and elsewhere. Such forms of inference also circumvented Aristotle's problem concerning the need to seek the ontological basis of the key terms of a syllogism.

However, like all formal systems, once the truth function rules of conditional propositions had to confront material reality the exceptions began to multiply, and the laws of contradiction and the excluded middle seemed to break down. Nye gives the example of the conditional proposition "If it is raining", and questions the status of this, and all related propositions and inferences, if it is not actually raining. She explains matters: "The status of the conditional with a false antecedent strains the most fundamental of logical principles, Parmenides's law of the excluded middle: a statement must be true and not true. The conditional with a false antecedent seems to be just that, neither true nor false or both true and false," page 69. These problems, and the ongoing debate with the Sceptics, forced the Stoics to redouble their efforts to find rules for the links between propositions and the things to which they referred, in order to establish a greater degree of certainty about the truth of propositions. The link was a rather abstract "what is said", which allegedly eliminated the problem of poor witnesses or errors of perception, tending towards a more algebraicised formal language.

Nye explains the social context of the development of this abstract logical language in terms of the Hellenic empire's needs:

If the superiority of Greek culture and the Greek right to rule was to prevail, it would have to be understood in a new way, not as based on race, but on linguistic and intellectual superiority...The grammar of that language, not its substantive form, would be the bearer of authority. The unity of the Hellenic world would be a unity of thought expressed in a language removed from peculiarities of accent, dialectic, emotional tone, and even of ideas, which might differ from Greek to Greek, or from East to West. Logic would provide the rigid skeleton and powerful muscle that could hold such an empire together, page 75.

When the Hellenic empire was replaced by the Roman, Greek remained the language used by most of the philosophers, "Latin was an inferior vehicle", Sandbach page 17, whilst wealthy Roman families sometimes employed their own Greek speaking philosopher. From amongst the competing schools it was Stoic logic which was adopted by the new order, based on the divine *logos* as interpreted by the Emperor, and later by the Pope. As Cicero explained: "Since

nothing is better than reason and reason exists in both man and god, reason is the first bond of unity between them. But those who have reason in common also have right to reason in common; and since right reason is law, this also must be seen as a common tie linking men with the gods...the whole universe must be seen as a single joint community of gods and men”, quoted on page 76 of Nye. Logic is not just the basis of the lawcourt and *polis* dialectic, it is also the “way to order thought and administer possessions...Stoics were popular in imperial Rome; they were sought after as advisors to statesmen and tutors to the sons of ruling citizens. The Stoic, it was thought, made the ideal administrator”, pages 76-7.

Epictetus’ dialectic of the slave

As a blow against the pro-slavery views of the Athenian philosophers, the slave Epictetus became a Stoic teacher on obtaining his freedom. His teachings have been collected in Epictetus (undated), and he says defiantly on the subject of freedom: “What then? have ye nothing that is free? *It may be nothing*. And who can compel you to assent to an appearance that is false? *No man*. And who can compel you not to assent to an appearance that is true? *No man*. Here, then, ye see that there is in you something that is by nature free”, page 29. His views on slavery are clear in the following: “For if thou endure to have slaves, it seems that thou thyself art first of all a slave. For virtue hath no communion with vice nor freedom with slavery...so neither would one that is free bear to be served by slaves, or that those living with him should be slaves”, page 110.

On the theme of truth and falsehood, Epictetus says rather more opaquely: “Beliefs which are sound and manifestly true are of necessity used even by those who deny them. And perhaps a man might adduce this as the greatest possible proof of the manifest truth of anything, that those who deny it are compelled to make use of it. Thus, if a man should deny that there is anything universally true, it is clear that he is obliged to affirm the contrary, the negation - that there is nothing universally true. Slave! not even this - for what is this but to say that if there is anything universal it is falsehood”, page 104. The chapter *On Disputation* reveals Epictetus’ sympathetic view of men who are rejected by those wishing to win dialectical contests as “ignorant fellows”. Although he states that “logic is that which distinguishes and investigates other things, and, as one may say, measures and weighs them”, page 183, his response to the

disputants well versed in reason is perhaps best summed up by the title of another chapter: *That the philosopher shall exhibit to the vulgar deeds, not words.*

The Epicureans

Novack (1965) is a good example of a Leninist, or strictly speaking a Trotskyist, thinker who posits a view of history which sees a fixed dualist distinction between materialism and idealism as fundamental. He praises the Epicureans for their materialism, i.e. their concern with atoms, whilst noting their liberal attitude to women and their reactionary attitude to slavery, a view contested by Thomson who claims that they opposed slavery. Their debt to the dialectics of the pre-Socratics is clear in the following Epicurean epitaph: "I was not, I was, I am not. I am unconscious of it", quoted on page 259 of Novack; who adds that

Epicurus lived in the period when the city-state was disintegrating, setting individuals free from their old ties and associations in the petty community. The new Alexandrian empire was superseding the city-states and creating new types of relations between individuals and the society around them. The atomism of the Epicureans sought to take these new conditions into account and find a rational basis for the new social purposes...the contradictory conception of the nature of and functions of the gods, and the ambivalent attitude toward them held by the Epicureans, reflected the contradictory desires and demands arising from their own intermediate status in the social structure, pages 251 and 252.

Epicurus, a contemporary of Zeno, developed a philosophy based on the primacy of matter, which became popular amongst the Roman middle classes, and culminated in the poem of Lucretius *De Reum Natura*. It was a polemic against the Stoic philosophy, with its emphasis on theology and determinism. However, Novack reveals his uncritical Eurocentrism when he fails to acknowledge the Egyptian origins of the Epicurean atomic theory used by Lucretius. Because his views on 'idealism' and religion are one-sided, failing to see either the function of religion for the masses themselves or its simultaneously revolutionary and reactionary potential, Novack reveals as much about his dualism as he does about the Roman "upper classes" when he explains:

Many upper-class Romans who themselves had lost belief in the magic of augurs nevertheless insisted upon maintaining the imposture to dupe and police the people. Cicero, much like Plato before him, wrote: "Antiquity no doubt was deceived in many things, and has had to be

corrected by time, by experience, or the spread of knowledge. And yet the reverence of augury and college of augurs and the practice of augury must be kept up on account of the beliefs of the common people and for its great service to the state". The Greek historian Polybius praises the Roman aristocracy for its adroit use of superstition in maintaining the power. "The foundation of Roman greatness," he asserted, "is superstition. This has been introduced into every aspect of their private and public life with every artifice to awe the imagination. For the masses in every state are unstable, full of lawless desires, irrational anger and violent passion. All that can be done is to hold them in check by fears of the unseen and similar shams. It was not for nothing but of deliberate design that the men of yore introduced to the masses notions about God and views on the after life", pages 264-5.

Novack's views on the Epicureans can be compared with the following remarks by Thomson on Greek materialism and atomism:

The resemblance of the atomic theory of Democritus and Epicurus to the atomic theory of modern physics is superficially so striking that that we are tempted to regard the work of those philosophers as scientific. This is a mistake. Ancient atomism is not science but ideology...it was an ideological expression of the individualism which characterised one section of the ruling class in the period of the dissolution of the city-state...The philosophy of Epicurus is the culmination of ancient philosophical materialism. His sense of dialectics, revealed in his conception of the interdependence of necessity and chance, of the relation between man and nature, and of the uneven development of human progress, invites comparison with the intuitive dialectics of Ionian materialism, which culminated in Heraclitus...The Epicurians did not seek to change the world, but to withdraw from it. Their ethics aimed at the self-negation of the subject. They formed a closed circle of friends, devoted to one another and to the pursuit of happiness in the present life, but cut off from the rest of the world so far as that was possible. Their renunciation of the city-state was a bold repudiation of slave-owning society expressed in the categories of the society which it condemned. It was the negative counterpart of the Stoic affirmation of world brotherhood, which expressed in positive form the tendencies making for the unification of the Mediterranean world, pages 312-4.

As Epicureanism faded, neo-Platonist, Stoic and neo-Aristotelian philosophies dominated Roman intellectual society. And after the fall of Rome, neo-Platonism kept alive dialectical modes of thinking in the Christian and Muslim world.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the existence of slavery allowed the emergence of a class of intellectuals who, following their studies with the Egyptian priests, were able to develop relatively open philosophical views similar to those of the itinerant thinkers of ancient India and China. We have also noted that the immanent dialectic of nature remained dominant, but that some Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus, tentatively applied the dialectic to society. There remains an ambivalence about Aristotle, who codified the rules of formal logic, yet also used the idioms of the ancient and tribal dialectic. These idioms were to influence Muslim philosophers, the scholastics, Hegel and Marx's methodology in *Capital*.

Chapter Four

Buddhists, Neo-Platonists, Alchemists and Mystics

Religion and Dialectics

The beginning of Genesis describes not only the creation of the world, but the development of God, McGregor Mathers (1991) page 47.

This chapter explains how the continuation and development of dialectics up to the Renaissance largely took place in religious thought. In order to understand the various forms of religious thought considered, it is necessary to link each to the social totality to which it corresponds. Analytical philosophers, like Ayer and Russell, see only petty scholastic nit-picking in the polemics of the period, when in fact they were sublimated social struggles in which untold numbers of people lost their lives. Although Caudwell (1971) normally speaks of fixed materialist-idealist dualities, he perceives in the following articulation the problem of explaining religious thought:

Since the criticism of religion becomes, to Marxism, the criticism of the concrete social relations which produced it, the struggle against its errors and its distortions can never be a struggle against religion as such - a kind of armchair atheism - because such a struggle is not a real one - it is ideal truth fighting ideal religion and both, when abstracted from action, are unreal. The very criticism of religion, as soon as it becomes criticism of concrete religion, becomes criticism of the social relations that engendered it, and when this criticism emerges creatively as a struggle, it will not be an ideal struggle against religious ideas but a concrete struggle against real social relations. There is no absolute truth to set against fantastic lies, but fantastic reality whose fantastic content is exposed in real living, Caudwell page 19 (all page numbers refer to the second half of his text).

Caudwell quotes the following paradoxical remark, attributed to Christ in the Gospels: *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*, on page 63. It captured the social contradictions of first century Roman occupied Palestine, in which the most powerful indigenous social groups formed a tension-ridden yet powerful

alliance with the Romans, thereby dominating the masses. Jesus “was prepared to whip the money-changers out of the Temple but not out of the State”, explains Caudwell on page 57, implying that the proto-communist ideals of Jesus and his followers were expressed in religious terms because they could not be realised in practice, a theme will recur throughout the chapter.

Mahayana Buddhism

Each technique is like a river bank: one stands there and watches the river flow without tumbling in and being carried off by the current: until there is nothing to stand on and no one to stand. Bancroft (1979) speaking of mantra chanting, page 31.

Chapter Two explained that Buddhism, with its dialectical underpinning, came into being during a period of intense social struggle in the Ganges valley. The republican tribes did not have the capacity to resist the more powerful imperial aggressor, so that they sought release from their suffering by universalising the human condition as one of intense suffering, or *duhkha*, an idea taken from yogic thought. For Buddhists the only possible release from suffering is to adopt the contemplative life and thereby attain Nirvana. As historical conditions changed, later Buddhist thinkers developed their abstract negative theory of suffering, and contrasted it with its opposite. It meant acknowledging the existence of *sukha* or pleasant feeling, which was more realistic in the new historical conditions, thereby widening the appeal of the faith. Lin-chi of the 9th century qualified the doctrine by suggesting that suffering could be avoided by living “without blind, enslaving desire”, Bancroft page 18. On the same page Bancroft adds for the 20th century: “The true human being does not strive for what he can get out of life but for what life is in itself, and he lives according to this knowledge”. The negative Buddhist articulation of desire will be compared with Hegel’s positive articulation in Chapter Six.

Buddhist masters and their initiates formed a key part of the intelligentsia of their society. To the extent that they were privileged relative to the masses, they sought accommodation with the local ruling class. Once they were able to convert monarchs, such as Ashoka in the third century BC, Buddhism became the state religion, and its leaders avoided taxes. The social relations inside the temple formed a microcosm of the class society in which they were

located, and the use of slave labour became common. “When addressing those senior to them - that is, those who were ordained earlier than they were - monks should bow and generally show due respect...Throughout its history Buddhism has tended to be the preserve of the members of an intellectual, spiritual and social elite, and the focus has almost everywhere been in the monasteries”, Snelling pages 89 and 110.

The Mahayana schism reacted against such an hierarchical structure, led by wealthy monks. The radicals tried to convert more of the peasantry, and others marginalised by the caste system, by advocating a retreat from the world, claiming that striving and desire are related to involvement in “politics”, a euphemism for life outside the temple. The retreat from “politics” avoided the need for converts to understand, and challenge, the reason for the exploitative relationships between the castes and other social forces, such as the guilds and merchants, in India around the first century AD. The social basis of the Mahayana schism is complex, because as monarchs turned away from Buddhism and took up Brahmin orthodoxy, the merchants often aligned themselves with Buddhism, in its revolutionary Mahayana phase, as part of their struggle for freedom from royal and Brahmic restrictions.

The dialectical aspects of Buddhist thought, imported from Vedic, Jain and other sources, were synthesized with other philosophical ideas by the Mahayana intellectuals. The concept of *Shunyata*, which translates as nothingness or emptiness, an important theme in this and later chapters, was added to early Buddhist ideas of totality, becoming, and the cycle of life and death, to be placed at the centre of a rejuvenated faith. The most important Mahayana philosopher is Nagarjuna, circa 150AD, who called the new faith the “middle way” to Nirvana. He sharpened the dialectical aspect of the faith, which became important in the eventual development of Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism. Hailed as a second Buddha, Nagarjuna’s hagiographers claimed he was originally a Brahmin magician who made himself invisible to seduce women. He eventually became attached to a Buddhist master and obtained a royal patron. Nagarjuna, according to Lindsay, was aware of the dialectical aspects of alchemic transmutation, and used this knowledge in his debates with his philosophical opponents, such as the classical logicians, or *Nyaya*. These philosophical and religious debates were inevitably related to the social struggles of second century northern India. The privileged castes gave donations to the intellectuals whose ideas best represented their interests. In his polemics Nagarjuna

exploits the quirky, dualistic nature of language to turn all propositions on their heads. He uses various devices to this end, notably his famous tetralemma, by which a simple proposition may be reduced to four logical forms: 1. A; 2. not-A; 3. both A and not-A; and 4. neither A nor not-A. To take a concrete example: 1. Everything is real; 2. Everything is unreal; 3. Everything is both real and unreal; and 4. Everything is not real and not unreal...Although Nagarjuna wanted to show the futility of all views, both positive and negative, the ruthless nature of his method - one writer calls it a kind of philosophical sadism - has a tendency to nihilism. Snelling pages 60-61.

Phillips, in Solomon and Higgins (1995), discusses the debates between Nagarjuna, Buddhists from other schools and the Nyaya formal logicians. He draws attention to "Nagarjuna's identification of paradoxes, contradictions, and impossibilities in the positions of the quarrelling schools", on page 93. Although his ideas are often contrived and arbitrary, in the following extracts from his famous *Averting the Arguments* we can see Nagarjuna's use of dialectics:

22. The 'being dependent nature' of existing things: that is called 'emptiness'.

That which has a nature of 'being dependent' - of that there is a non-self-existent nature.

49. If a son is produced by a father, and if that (father) is produced that very son (when he is born),

Then tell me, in this case, who produces whom?

50. You tell me! Which of the two becomes the father, and which the son - Since they both carry characteristics of 'father' and 'son'? In that case there is doubt.

70. All things prevail for him for whom emptiness prevails;

Nothing whatever prevails for him for whom emptiness prevails.

Quoted in Phillips page 95-100.

Zen Buddhism

The circle represents on one level the totality of the universe and on another level its ultimate voidness, Bancroft page 35.

As Buddhism gradually declined in India, Zen, or Ch'an, Buddhism developed in China in the sixth century A.D. when Bodhidharma moved there. He became China's first patriarch,

assisted greatly by the patronage of the Emperor Wu, a Buddhist convert. When asked by the Emperor to explain Ch'an, Bodhidharma is alleged to have said: "Vast emptiness, and there's nothing holy in it". A novice who spoke respectfully about the Buddha was "told to rinse his mouth out and never to utter that dirty word again"; both quotes are from Bancroft page 7. Snelling (1990) explains the spread of Zen as follows: "Buddhism...no doubt offered consolations that the intellectual and aristocratic elite were not able to find in their native traditions during this turbulent and insecure period...Royal blessing and the support of the literati ensured it success. Soon enormous numbers of Chinese were ordaining as monks and nuns - by around 514CE there were two million of them", page 31. However, this success contained within it the seeds of eclipse for Chinese Buddhism, and its move to, and rejuvenation, in Japan:

The success of Buddhism had caused backlash before, but in 845 the 'church', which now had riches and power enough to eclipse those of the straitened Emperor himself, was subjected to a draconian blow from which it never fully recovered. Buddhism was not actually outlawed, but monks and nuns were required to go back to lay life, monasteries and temples were closed, and monastic lands, slaves and treasuries were seized. The Ch'an and Pure Land schools were resilient enough to survive this holocaust, but thereafter Chinese Buddhism went into an almost fatal decline. Snelling page 32.

The hierarchical Zen temple community lived off the peasant-created surplus, as is hinted at in the following piece of hagiography concerning the 18th century Zen master Hakuin: "As an old man, he would sit in the fields with the peasants, perched on the furrows while they planted the seed, and talk to them of Zen", Bancroft page 22. Although the monks and their pupils did little or no manual work, some temples became very wealthy through their social connections. Indian Buddhist temples were originally based on tribal councils, enabling some degree of democracy, but gradually the Zen intelligentsia, or "masters", came to dominate the various sects and established a strict hierarchy similar to that of a tribal priesthood. The master Hakuin, whose "great death" theory is reminiscent of tribal Shamanistic thought, reveals the extent to which the retreat from 'politics' had been abandoned: "All of these men were possessed of insight far surpassing that of ordinary monks. Yet they assisted constantly in countless governmental affairs, rubbed shoulders with the élite of many lands, associated with nobles of the highest rank, participated in music, the rituals, and military affairs, engaged in ceremonial competitions, but never for a moment did they lose the affinity for the

Way...Indeed they are as different from those fools who starve to death on mountains, thinking that dead sitting and silent illumination suffice”, quoted in Solomon and Higgins pages 18-19. Where necessary the monks would rejuvenate their weakened ranks by allowing members of the peasantry to rise up their hierarchy; Bancroft mentions “Hui Neg, an illiterate peasant boy, who was one day to become the great Sixth Patriarch of Zen”, page 12.

Rather like some early Christians, who rejected faith based on knowledge and accepted only that based on belief, Japanese Buddhism claimed to reject all philosophical speculation, metaphysics, and conceptual understanding. Zen took in elements of Taoist and Vedic thought, and ancient Yogic meditation techniques in its search for an ungraspable Void or Nirvana. Its goal is identical to the unchanging timeless Parmenidean Being of the previous chapter, which is opposed to *Samsara*, the world of appearances, or cycle of life and death. However, an important development over Platonic thought is that the Void is not apart from the world of appearances, as Hui Neng (637-714AD) explains: “ The infinite Ground is not for one second apart from the ordinary world of phenomena. If you look for it as such, you will find yourself cut off from the ordinary relative world, which is as much your reality as everything else.”, quoted in Bancroft page 15.

Zen adopted a sceptical attitude towards language and thought in the search for enlightenment: “The central methods of Zen are aimed at helping a pupil see that the conventional ways in which the world is conceptualized are useful for particular purposes but lack substance; when the concept-world is broken through, the pupil will come to experience of unmediated Reality - the discovery of the ineffable wonder which is existence itself...The phenomenal world is seen as it is, in its ‘isness’, without the projection of the ‘I’. The Mahayana School realised that the concept ‘all things are Reality’ implicitly opposes ‘all things’ to Reality and then tries to create a union. Reality and all things are already united, and to *make* a union either in thought or feeling is to give oneself the idea that it does not already exist. In thought they can be separated, but in actuality there is no separation”, Bancroft pages 7-8.

Although this quote captures the totalising *conceptual* aspects of Zen, Bancroft’s account is one-sided, because it fails to mention the social, economic and political aspects of the totality in which Zen Buddhism arose in China. Zen’s dialectical idioms were partly negated by the use

of a combination of home spun truths, popular psychology, such as 'enjoy every moment of your life for what it is', and vulgar moralising, to accommodate the needs of the dominant social class. However, at their penetrative, Zen's dialectical formulations reveal a "devastating use of contradiction and paradox...paradox is a well known means of presenting religious truth...Zen...uses concrete presentation rather than abstraction", Bancroft (1979) pages 5-6. On the same page she continues "For instance, according to Fudaishi:

*Empty-handed I go and yet the spade is in my hands;
I walk on foot, and yet I am riding on the back of an ox:
When I pass over the bridge,
Lo, the water flows not, but the bridge is flowing",*

Also useful in challenging the static nature of being, is the Zen denial of opposites, the way it sees the truth by using neither assertion nor negation. Ummon says, "In Zen there is absolute freedom: sometimes it negates and other times it affirms; it does either way at pleasure...Zen denies all attempts to rationalise it, make sense of it, or turn it into a philosophy, and it compares man's desire to grasp it intellectually to a finger pointing at the moon - the finger continually being mistaken for the moon itself. It has an amused indifference to the worldly goals of men. The Zen outlook has it that all is equally holy - even straw mats and horse dung - and to distinguish one of life's aspects and make it of more importance than another is to fall into dualistic error rather than reality.", Bancroft (1979) pages 5-6.

Speaking of the yogic meditational technique Suzuki, a famous 20th century Zen master, reveals the use of dialectics when he says:

When we cross our legs like this, even though we have a right leg and a left leg, they have become one. The position expresses the oneness of duality: not two and not one. This is the most important teaching: not two, and not one. Our body and mind are not two and not one. If you think your body and mind are two, that is wrong; if you think that they are one, that is wrong also. Our body and mind are both two and one. We usually think that if something is not one, it is more than one; if it is not singular, it is plural. But in actual experience, our life is not only plural, but also singular. Each one of us is both dependent and independent. After some years we will die. If we just think that it is the end of our life, this will be the wrong understanding. But, on the other hand, if we think that we do not die, this is also wrong. We die, and we do not die. This is the right understanding. Some people may say that our mind

or soul exists forever, and it is only our physical body which dies. But this is not exactly right, because both mind and body have their end. But at the same time it is also true that they exist eternally. And even though we say mind and body, they are actually two sides of one coin. This is the right understanding. So when we take this posture it symbolizes this truth. When I have the left foot on the right side of my body, and right foot on the left side of my body, I do not know which is which. So either may be the left or the right side, quoted in Bancroft pages 26-27.

Suzuki also speaks of the “swinging door movement” which as Bancroft explains “brings awareness not of the little ego but of universal or Buddha nature. In this awareness the usual dualistic way in which we regard life - good times and bad times, this and that, I and you - are seen as they really are; expressions of one indivisible existence...Yet we must not cling to oneness as though it too were a thing. The one meaning is expressed in every variation - every blade of grass and grain of sand”, pages 27-28.

Another 20th century Zen master is Seung Sahn (S), and Bancroft quotes a conversation between him and a questioner (Q):

S One plus two equals zero.

Q I don't see how.

S Okay. Suppose someone gives me an apple. I eat it. Then he gives me two more apples. I eat them. All the apples are gone. So one plus two equals zero.

Q Hmmm.

S You must understand this. Before you were born, you were zero. Now you are one. In the future, you will die and again become zero. All things in the universe are like this; they arise from emptiness and return to emptiness. So zero equals one, one equals zero.

Q I see that.

S In elementary school, they teach that one plus two equals three. In our Zen elementary school, we teach that one plus two equals zero. Which one is correct?

Q Both.

S If you say 'both', I say 'neither'.

Q Why?

S If you say 'both', then the space ship cannot go to the moon. When only one plus two equals three, then it can reach the moon. But if one plus two also equals zero, then on the way the space ship will disappear. So I say, neither is correct.

Q Then what would be a proper answer?

S 'Both' is wrong, so I hit you. Also 'neither' is wrong, so I hit myself. The first teaching in Buddhism is 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form.' This means that one equals zero, zero equals one. But who makes form? Who makes emptiness? Both form and emptiness are concepts. Concepts are made by your own thinking. Descartes said, 'I think therefore I am.' But if I am not thinking, then what? Before thinking, there is no you or I, no form or emptiness, no right or wrong. So even 'no form, no emptiness' is wrong. In true emptiness, before thinking, you only keep a clear mind. All things are just as they are. 'Form is form, emptiness is emptiness.'

Q I'm afraid I still don't really understand.

S If you want to understand, already this is a mistake. Only go straight ahead and keep don't-know mind. Then you will understand everything.

Q What is enlightenment?

S Enlightenment is only a name. If you make enlightenment, then enlightenment exists. But if enlightenment exists, ignorance exists too. Good and bad, right and wrong, enlightened and ignorant - all these are opposites. All opposites are just your own thinking. The truth is absolute, beyond thinking, beyond opposites. If you make something, you will get something. but if you don't make anything, you will get everything. Quoted on page 66 of Bancroft.

Whilst this conversation highlights aspects of dialectical thought, it is, as with most Buddhist formulations, abstract and lacking in social grounding. Similar criticisms apply to the koan, a short saying on which the student reflects, a much discussed example of the dialectical aspect of Zen. It shows both the profound aspects of Zen thinking, whilst implicitly revealing the profoundly hierarchical social relationships of the religion: the essence of the koan is for the pupil to accept the arbitrary whim of the master. Typical of the hagiography of Zen is "Juching saw that Dogen's enlightenment was real", Bancroft page 20, who continues: "Some ancient but still well-used koans are: What is the sound of one hand clapping?...Take both front and rear wheels (of a cart) away and remove the axle: then what will it be?...What did your original face look like before your father and mother were born?", pages 11 and 14. She quotes two masters on the koan: "It cannot be understood by logic; it cannot be transmitted in

word; it cannot be explained in writing; it cannot be measured by reason. It is like the poisoned drum that kills all who hear it, or like the great fire that consumes all who come near it.”, page 14.

The former peasant Hui Neng comments on the koan and its link to the concept of emptiness: *When you hear me speak of emptiness, don't become attached to it, especially don't become attached to any idea of it. Merely 'sitting' still with your mind vacant, you fall into notional emptiness. The boundless emptiness of the sky embraces the 'ten thousand things' of every shape and form - the sun, moon, and stars; mountains and rivers; bushes and trees; bad people and good; good teachings and bad; heavens and hells. All these are included in emptiness. The emptiness of your original nature is just like this. It too embraces everything. To this aspect the word 'great' applies. All and everything is included in your own original nature,* page 15.

Hakuin explained the function of the koan as follows:

If you take up one koan and investigate it without ceasing, your thoughts will die and your ego-demands will be destroyed. It is as though a vast abyss opened up in front of you, with no place to put your hands and feet. You face death, and your heart feels as though it were fire. Then suddenly you are one with the koan, and body and mind are let go...This is known as seeing into one's own nature. You must push forward relentlessly, and with the help of this great concentration you will penetrate without fail to the infinite source of your own nature. Bancroft page 24.

For all its dialectical articulations, Zen failed to challenge the dominance of men over women: “Women were also accepted...but only under stringent conditions, which included unmarried status and the passing of a test presented by the keeper of the gate. Zen nuns created and solved their own koans, and some of these are famous, such as the night interview of the nun Myotei who took off all her clothes before going to her teacher. The koan is: What is the real meaning of Myotei's coming naked for the night interview?”, Bancroft, page 12, which tells us much about Zen gender relations.

Zen developed in a feudal Japanese culture which rejected individual being, rarely using the pronoun 'I', yet even this is given a dialectical gloss: “Japanese society discourages self-

assertiveness at the same time that it encourages indirectness and allusiveness in communication...whereas most Western philosophers regard self-contradiction as something to be avoided, Japanese thinkers see the extreme form of self-contradiction that is paradox as a unique source of philosophical insight”, pages 3-4 of Solomon and Higgins (1995). We can obtain further insight into the social basis of Zen dialectics from the following description of the reality of 13th century feudal Japan by the Zen master Dogen: “Tonight or tomorrow we may contract some serious disease, or may have to endure such terrible pain as to be unable to distinguish east from west. Or, we may be killed suddenly by some demon, encounter trouble with brigands, or be killed by some enemy. Everything is truly uncertain”, quoted in Solomon and Higgins page 11.

In the west today the dialectical aspects of Buddhist thought have been largely forgotten. Its message for, largely middle class, converts to Buddhism is retreat to a state of bliss: “an English schoolteacher says: ‘there was blackbird in the garden, and it was as though there had never been a blackbird before. All my inner turmoil melted away and I felt full of clarity and indescribable peace. I seemed at one with everything around me and saw people with all judgement suspended, so that they seemed perfect in themselves.’”, Bancroft page 10.

Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists

*Therefore, if time robs eternity of its permanence and appropriates it, it destroys it; for though eternity may in some manner retain hold of it, it is destroyed by passing wholly into time, Plotinus in the *Enneads*, quoted in Gregory (1991) page 125.*

*The philosopher...must be taught dialectical argument and be made a master of Dialectic, Plotinus, in the *Enneads*, on page 141 of Gregory.*

*...with the bodies of plants and animals; each is a unity, and if they escape their unity, broken into fragments, they lose their former essence; no longer what they were but become new beings, Plotinus from the *Enneads*, quoted on page 36 of Gregory (1991).*

The (creative) process is like the unfolding of a seed, moving from simple origin to termination in the world of sense, the prior always remaining in its place, while begetting its

successor from a store of indescribable power, Plotinus in the *Enneads* quoted on page 96 of Gregory.

(The One is) not a determinate being, is without quality and quantity, and is neither intellect not soul; it is not in motion nor yet at rest; not in place, not in time, but 'self-contained, unique in form' - or rather, formless, existing before all form, before movement, before rest; for these are the attributes of Being, which make it manifold. Why, then, if not in motion, is it not at rest?, Plotinus in the *Enneads*, quoted on page 37 of Gregory.

These are examples of the dialectical metaphysics of Plotinus, the originator of Neo-Platonism, who was profoundly influential on most of the thinkers considered in the remainder of this chapter. Gregory points out that this mode of thought, with its preoccupation with what he translates as the *intellect*, became the world view of the “educated classes of the later Roman empire...coinciding with a period of material decline and religious anxiety unparalleled under the Roman empire”, page *vii*. Plotinus (204-271AD), who mixed in the highest circles of Roman society and like the Greek philosophers denigrated the manual work performed by slaves and artisans, was the most important of a group of philosophers. His studies in Alexandria exposed him to a “cosmopolitan centre of learning where western and eastern cultural influences coincided, and where a rich variety of philosophical schools were flourishing...In his thirty-ninth year, hoping to make acquaintance with the philosophy of Persia and India, he joined a disastrous military campaign against the Persians led by the Emperor Gordian III and on its defeat escaped with difficulty to settle in Rome, where the rest of his life’s work was done”, Gregory pages 3-4.

The later Empire was marked by “foreign invasions and military defeats at the frontiers...civil strife...economic crisis and widespread social unrest...through all this the ruling classes of Rome, the cities and town of Italy and provinces experienced a new political impotence and want of purpose”, page 19. So onerous were the military, land and poll taxes, not to mention spiralling inflation and the plague, that the “once-prosperous urban societies faced ruin”. page 21. It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that Plotinus, who refers to these troubles in the *Enneads*, advocated a retreat from politics, alienation and disharmony. It was his alternative to the apparently impotent Olympian gods, with the adoption of a life of contemplation and escape from the world: “the religion of Plotinus is individualistic, intellectual and elitist...there

is also an optimistic humanism that contrasts with the Christian idea of Man's sinful inadequacy and dependence on divine grace", page 18. The Roman philosophers, unlike "the rabble", live like: "The Gods in heaven, being at leisure, for ever contemplate", *Enneads* quoted in Gregory page 63. Plotinus compares the philosopher with the manual worker: "Everywhere we shall find that making and action are either a weakening or an accompaniment of contemplation...Children of dull intelligence bear witness to this, in that, incapable of intellectual and theoretical study, they descend to the crafts and manual labour", *Enneads* quoted on page 80 of Gregory.

The Neo-Platonists, who also included the Roman Porphyry, his pupil Iamblichus and the 5th century Athenian Proclus, were similarly influenced both by Plato's negative attitude to physical being, and by Aristotle's cosmology. Their thought was also derived from the pre-Socratic *logos*, i.e. the rational principle mediating between the opposing forces and contradictions in nature and society, from Pythagorean number and duality theory, and from the tribal dialectic of the One and the many. Plotinus, in the *Enneads*, makes it clear that he is aware of the "wise men of Egypt", who through hieroglyphics "exhibited the non-discursive thought of Intellect", quoted in Gregory page 62. Neo-Platonists were aware of the doctrines of Christianity, Gnosticism and other faiths, against which they polemicised. However, their major influence was Plato's dialogues; but theirs was a version of Plato which took no account of the different stages in his thought on such topics as the Forms, or *archetypes* as they came to be known, and the distinction between knowledge and opinion.

Nevertheless, the Neo-Platonists were acutely aware of Plato's dialectical mode of thinking, especially the debate on the One and the many in the *Parmenides*, and the oppositions Motion/Rest and Sameness/Otherness in the *Sophist*. The *Enneads* also refer to Aristotle's dialectical oppositions between potentiality and actuality, and form and matter. Speaking of matter Plotinus says: "Grasped, then, by both orders of existence, it can belong to neither in actuality; its fate is to be potentiality merely, a feeble and faint shadow with no power to take on form. It is therefore actually a shadow, and so actually a falsity; which is equivalent to 'true falsity', or 'real non-existence'...static but without position...present yet unseen...it for ever wears contrary appearances, small and large, less and more, deficient and excessive", *Enneads*, quoted on Gregory pages 93-4.

Plotinus (1914) tells us that the dialectic is “a habit enabling its possessor to reason about every thing, to know what each thing is, and in what it differs from other things, what the common something is in which it participates, where each of these subsists, if a thing is, what it is, what the number is of beings, and again of non-beings (which are not nothing) but different from beings”, page 18. Showing the influence of both Plato and Aristotle, and anticipating Hegel, Plotinus explains that dialectic attempts to define “what a thing is, and in order to obtain a knowledge of the first genera of things, intellectually connecting that which results from these, till it has proceeded through the whole of an intelligible nature; and again, by an analytic process it arrives at that to which it had proceeded from the first. Then, however, it becomes quiescent, because so far as it arrives thither it is at rest, and being no longer busily employed, but becoming one, it surveys what is called logic”, page 18.

Both Gregory and Lindsay mention Plotinus’ interest in magic, and the following quotes from the *Enneads* link his views to those of the pre-Socratic Empedocles:

How are magical practices to be explained? By sympathy, by the existence of a concordance of like things and a contrariety of unlike things, and by a diversity of many operative powers in the one living universe. Without any external contrivance, there is much drawing and spell-binding. The true magic is the Love and Strife in the universe. In magical practices men turn all this to their own uses. Quoted on page 7 of Lindsay (1970).

Suppose a magician were outside the universe: he could not entice or bring down powers by bewitchments or binding spells. But as it is, because he operates from within the world, he makes his influence felt, knowing the mutual attractions at work within the living organism...throughout the universe, though composed of contraries, a single harmony exists, and even those contraries share an affinity and kinship...Thus both the good and the bad exist, like contrasting movements of a dancer obedient to the same art; and while we see both good and bad in the different sections of the dance, it is the contrast that gives perfection to the whole, quoted in Gregory pages 106-7.

In Plotinus’ dialectical metaphysics the sources, or hypostases, of existence are the One, the Intellect and the Soul, in descending order. From these come the *moments* in the Becoming of the multiplicity of Nature, or the material world, which though corrupt, and subject to desire and evil, always aspire to the Good in its ultimate source, the One. The function of the

dialectic, “the science which divides and classifies the forms of Being” Gregory page 17, is to show the way back for individual things, which Plotinus defines by their activity, to the unity of the One, via the Intellect. The One is infinite, has no attributes, and transcends existence, knowledge and description; all of which was the inspiration for the *negative theology* of the various forms of mystical thought, to be considered later. If, like Jack Lindsay, we are trying to link thought to social being then for Plotinus the One or Essence, to which all material things aspire, must be a sublimation of the Roman Empire. In this context it is worth pointing out that Plotinus was “highly honoured by the Emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina”, Lindsay page 4. The One was a “metaphysical endorsement to the structure of imperial government”, page 22, in which the later emperors became inaccessible, ostentatiously dressed and ‘sacred’.

Gregory claims that Plotinus was accused of plagiarising Numenius of Apamea, who believed that “the whole of intelligible Being is contained in each of its parts”, page 14. This came to be known as the identity, or interpenetration, between the macrocosm and the microcosm, from which Plotinus drew the conclusion that “the individual human being is a microcosm of the universe”, page 15. It is an important insight, as it anticipates developments in, for example, biology and Marxist political economy, with its idea that the individual contains, in microcosm, all the contradictions of capitalist social relations. As well as the use of negation, and the negation of the negation, in his metaphysics, Plotinus describes the contradictory tendency of the many to both multiply and hence become more corrupt, formless and less real, but paradoxically thereby to strengthen their link to the primal, real and perfect force of the One. However, the ascent of the individual soul back to the One is the task of the philosopher, or the initiated mystic, through withdrawal from ‘politics’ and a life of intellectual contemplation, an ascent which therefore excludes the labouring masses.

Lindsay draws attention to alchemic aspects of Plotinus’ thought: “there is no part of the mixed substance which does not participate in the mixture as a whole”, quoted on page 22. He particularly shows how aspects of Neo-Platonist dialectics, for example the moments, or stages, of the soul’s descent, were important in the further development of alchemy. Speaking of the colour of objects, such as metals, Plotinus develops the positive concept of desire; although like the Buddhists he is aware of its negative side, desire creates a unity between subject and object. He states: “That light known, then indeed we are stirred towards those

beings in longing and rejoicing over the radiance about them. Each one of them exists for itself, but becomes an object of desire by the colour cast upon it from the Good, source of those graces and the love they evoke...As soon as the glow from above has pervaded it, the soul gathers strength, truly spreads its wings”, quoted on page 51 of Lindsay. Gregory points out that Plotinus was aware of the identity of the subject and object; the former “looks with unaverted eye and in unbroken contemplation, he no longer sees another, but his seeing and its object merge, the seen becomes identical with sight”, *Enneads* quoted on page 174. In applying the dialectic to epistemology, Plotinus moved philosophy on to a new level of competence.

Lucian’s dialectic

..knowledge is useless if you do not try to improve the way you conduct your life, Lucian, quoted on page 29 of Robinson (1976).

Lucian was a satirist and social critic of Syrian descent, who lived in the second century A.D.. He sublimated his satires of Roman life by writing dramas from Greek myth and philosophy, which were popular themes with the Roman upper class, using characters such as politicians, philosophers and playwrights. According to Robinson (1979), Lucian was a Romanised Sophist, a sharp critic of the Socratic form of argument set out in Plato’s dialogues. The names of his texts, *The Parasite*, *The Dead Come to Life*, *Philosophers for Sale* and *The Lover of Lies*, make plain his preoccupation with the paradoxes and hypocrisies of the Roman ruling classes. Novack refers to Lucian’s use of rhetoric and dramatic effect to highlight social contradiction: “In Lucian’s Hades, society is turned upside down and the roles of the classes are reversed. The rich and powerful become penniless and despised; the common people enact legislation against the powers that were”, page 277.

As Lucian says: “we need not blame the philosophers for the prevalence of atheism. Why, what can one expect of men when they see all life today topsy-turvy - the good neglected, pining in poverty, disease, and slavery; detestable scoundrels honoured, rolling in wealth and ordering their betters about; temple robbers undetected and unpunished; the innocent constantly crucified and bastinadoed? With this evidence it is only natural that they should conclude against our existence”, quoted in Novack, page 279-80. Lucian shows the mismatch between the high theory and the debauched practice of the philosophers and politicians. On

being told that he is not in Athens, a character in one of the satires says: “Thanks, you did well to remind me. I thought I was sober and talking about reality”, quoted in Robinson, page 29. Robinson continues: “the contrast between the possession of vices and the profession of virtue depends for its satirical interest not on the individuality of the vice, but on the variety of techniques which Lucian uses to describe and ridicule it”, page 31. This anticipates Mandeville’s paradox of the existence of private vices and public benefits in 18th century Europe, which proved fruitful to Rousseau, Adam Smith and other social critics.

Lucian shows his awareness of the residue of tribal thinking in Greek and Roman thought, whilst regularly mentioning the anthropocentric theme of the relationship between gods, humans and animals. However, he not only notes their close proximity with each other, but also downgrades the status of the first two in line with the brutality, greed and generally debased lifestyle of the ruling class.

The Hermetica

Hermes declares that the totality of things, though multiple, is called One...(Trismegistos) deepens the triadic concept by applying it directly to the moment of change, in which simultaneously there occur an act of union and an act of expulsion, of negation.

Zosimos, with Lindsay’s commentary, quoted in Lindsay (1970) pages 175 and 177.

The Hermetica is a collection of writings mythically attributed to the ancient Egyptian deified sage Thoth, or the Greek Hermes Trismegistus, who revealed all knowledge, including astronomy, architecture, geology, medicine and much else. The writings were to influence a number of important philosophers and scientists including Leonardo da Vinci, Roger Bacon, Newton, Jung, and others from Muslim and Jewish cultures. *The Hermetica* is actually a collection of texts written, by second and third century scholars in the port-city of Alexandria, in Greek, Latin and Coptic. During this period Alexandria was a melting pot for sages and scientists from every race and nation, and the collection of half a million scrolls in the famous library was a tribute to the liberal régime of Ptolemy I. The work is an attempt to bring together Egyptian religion and philosophy, the Mysteries or Oneness that contains all opposites. Although presented in Greek dialogue style, the work accords in content and idiom with the later discovered ancient Egyptian writings, such as the *Pyramid Texts*.

There follow some dialectical formulations as extracts from the abridgement of the text, see *The Hermetica* (1997):

God is Oneness...Because he unites every thing, his nature is paradoxical. He is the creator who creates himself (page 43)...The All is not many separate things, but the Oneness that subsumes the parts. The All and the One are identical...they are united – linked together, and connected by a chain of Being...Do you think there are many Gods? That's absurd – God is one...Atum works with Nature, within the laws of Necessity, causing extinction and renewal (pages 46-8)...The Cosmos creates Time. Time creates Change... The essence of Time is movement. The essence of Change is Life...Time works through increase and decrease. Change works through quality and quantity (page 77)...through the intermingling of the two natures, the female acquires male vigour, and the male is relaxed in female languor (page 84)...The end of becoming is the beginning of destruction. The end of destruction is the beginning of becoming...The new comes out of the old (page 119)...Embrace within yourself all opposites – heat and cold, hard and fluid...See that everything coexists within Mind (page 133)...For the soul's first step is to struggle against itself – stirring up a civil war. It is a feud for unity against duality. The one seeking to unite and the other seeking to divide (page 140)...There is no discord amongst the inhabitants of heaven (page 147).

Social Tensions and the Alchemic Method

...the essence of drama is conflict, Gilchrist (1991), page 108.

With all their limited applications (alchemists) yet saw reality as unitary, concrete, involving critical or nodal points of change, and consisting of interrelated hierarchical levels of organisation; and they wanted a method above all which brought all these aspects together. They saw human values as implicated in every phase of the work and as determining the direction of research from within the processes, not merely as a system of ends imposed from without, Lindsay page 392.

By my virtue and efficacy I make the imperfect perfect, whether it be a metal or a human body. I mix its ingredients, and temper the four elements. I reconcile opposites, and calm

their Discord. This is the golden chain which I have linked together of my heavenly virtues and earthly substances.

Mehung, quoted in Gilchrist, page 50.

In the West alchemy centred on metals and minerals, coming of age in the melting pot that was Alexandria during the Roman empire. It later shifted to a new centre of gravity in the Muslim world from where it re-emerged in Europe in the 12th century. In the East, it “had a preoccupation with creating an elixir of longevity” and the “tradition carried on (with cyclical ups and downs) right through the succeeding centuries”, page 4 of Gilchrist (1991). Western practitioners of the art seem to have come from various sections of the growing middle classes, in particular artisans initiated into metal-work skills, merchants and moneylenders. Other practitioners were dissident monks and priests, and other independent intellectuals, including some women, with the means to buy suitable premises, equipment and raw materials.

Alchemists were often connected with counterfeiting gold and silver, accused of causing inflation, condemned by the Church, Emperor or a local monarch, and as a result were “underground” (Lindsay), insecure and often secretive. The reputation of alchemy “fluctuated. Sometimes it was considered to be a most elevated study, worthy to be practised by royalty, while sometimes it was looked upon as the profession of rogues and knaves...only to be passed on directly by word of mouth or through the ambiguity of symbol and allegory”, Gilchrist, page 4. The alchemists’ social isolation is made clear in the following extract:

Thus we feel prompted at times to burst forth into the desolate exclamation of Cain: ‘Whoever finds me will slay me.’ Yet we are not the murderers of our brethren; we are anxious only to do good to our fellow-men. But even our kindness and charitable compassion are rewarded with black ingratitude - ingratitude that cries to heaven for vengeance. It was only a short time ago that, after visiting the plague-stricken haunts of a certain city, and restoring the sick to perfect health by means of my miraculous medicine, I found myself surrounded by a yelling mob, who demanded that I should give to them my Elixir of the Sages; and it was only by changing my dress and my name, by shaving off my beard and putting on a wig, that I was enabled to save my life...an anonymous writer, quoted in Gilchrist pages 63-4. Given this, it is hardly surprising that the thought of the alchemist intellectuals shows a routine preoccupation with contradictions and other aspects of dialectical thinking.

Lindsay's *Origins of Alchemy* (1970) points out that the alchemists' preoccupation with precious metals began in the ancient world. The Egyptians referred to gold as the "flesh of the gods" and associated it with royalty, whilst later alchemic texts refer to the Egyptian Nun, or "darkness", and the god Thoth. Lindsay goes on to trace the developments in Greek thought which influenced alchemic formulations. As well as the pre-Socratics, Aristotle and Plato, he points to the contradictory social reality and the corresponding thought of the Stoics. In their struggle against social isolation the Stoics "produced a new conception of the unity of process and of the interrelation of objects or beings inside it", page 20. When applied to alchemy this led to the notion of four successive stages involving a increased specification of an object, "each stage including those that had happened before it", page 20. This mode of thought was, mediated by mystics such as Boehme, to have a profound influence on Hegel.

Gilchrist points out that alchemy tended to synthesise knowledge from a variety of sources in its goal of transmuting base metals into gold: "it is, physically, spiritually, and psychically, a science manifesting throughout all form and all life", Cockren, quoted in Gilchrist page 8. The oppositions in the life of the alchemist were sublimated into the oppositions in the imagery of their literature and art. The famous double headed-dragon combines opposition and synthesis because it contains two vital dualities in alchemy: the sun and moon from astrology, and the male and female opposition of biology. Gilchrist explains the totalising methodology:

The work of the alchemist is to bring about succeeding changes in the material he operates on, transforming it from a gross, unrefined state to a perfect and purified form...Mainstream alchemy is a discipline involving physical, psychological and spiritual work, and if any one of these elements is taken out of context and said to represent the alchemical tradition, then the wholeness and true quality of alchemy is lost, page 1.

We note here not only the familiar theme of totalisation, but also the further elaboration of successive *stages of transformation* which was typical of Stoic thought: "golden vessels, for instance, were thought to transform the quality of the drink they contained", page 12. Thomas Vaughan, an 18th century alchemist, wrote:

Truth calls to man: 'Be ye transmuted...be ye transmuted from dead stones into living philosophical stones. I am the true Medicine, rectifying and transmuting that which is no more into that which it was before corruption, and into something better by far, and that which is not into that which it ought to be', quoted in Gilchrist, page 91.

Whilst the following shows how the alchemist begins with primal material and then destroys its outward form, it also hints at a totalising link between the natural and the social :

Thus the male and female principles of the matter are released and can be reunited in a stage often depicted as the marriage of the King and Queen. Through initial conflict and division energy becomes available, a source of fuel for the entire operation. Further treatment of the substance in the vessel by heat leads to its 'death'...But the 'soul' of the matter still lingers in the hermetically sealed vessel...With the right food and heat it grows until it 'whitens', indicating that the Elixir is perfected in its first degree...It is the female tincture, equated with the moon. To gain the gold-giving tincture, the sun, further treatment is necessary until the Elixir reddens...Terms such as birth, death and resurrection are not used as mere associations but as indications of real states through which the matter and the soul of the alchemist must pass, Gilchrist pages 9-10.

With reference to the primal matter, with its “apparent unity”, alchemy both retained its dialectical aspects and superseded the Aristotelian cosmology, anticipating modern physics and chemistry, by saying matter is that:

from which all natural objects take their origin. Its properties are of a singular kind; for, in addition to its marvellous nature and form, it is neither hot and dry like fire, nor cold and wet like water, nor cold and dry like earth, but a perfect preparation of all the elements...With respect to its appearance, figure, form, and shape, they call it a stone, and not a stone...It is found potentially everywhere, and in everything, but in all its perfection and fullness only in one thing, anonymous, quoted on page 42 of Gilchrist.

Similarly Muslim alchemists labelled the *stages*, which were often undertaken at times guided by astrological considerations, in the transformation process. Geber, or Abu Musa Jabir of the 8th century, calls the stages: “sublimation, descension, distillation, calcination, solution, coagulation, fixation and ceration. These involve processes we would recognise in physical terms as heating, condensation, evaporation, and so on”, Gilchrist, page 40. Lindsay points out that Ibn Umail was aware that “alchemic combination is not just the union of any two substances; the latter must have a living relationship to one another, a dialectical unity, before their coming-together can be productive of a qualitative change”, page 187. Chemistry, with

its positivistic search for objective 'facts' concentrated only on these physical aspects, it neglected the 'metaphysical' aspects such as emblems, symbolism, astrology, myth and the importance of the personal involvement and commitment of the alchemist. For our purposes these aspects remain valuable because they hint at the idea of an essence, "Venus unveiled' in her chamber" Lindsay page 49, behind the appearance of nature. Despite the positivists, from earliest tribal society it has been clear that nature is composed of an interpenetrating dualism of what is immediately available to the senses and what is not. The gender reference in this quote is significant because some alchemists believed that the female principle could be awakened by the participation of a women in the transmutation process because this allowed it to go on to "higher levels". However, in reality only ancient Egypt came anywhere near according women the kind of status that this alchemic belief implies.

Gilchrist points out that the alchemists' theory of transformation differed from that contained in Aristotle's *Physics*, which he probably took from Egyptian priests. The alchemists believed that the four elements existed in a pure form at the heart of matter, "and were seen more as forces, or agencies, rather than as detectable substances", page 18. The different types of matter were formed by changes in the proportions of the pure elements, but the actual transformation of one matter to another could only be effected with the aid of a pure element, normally specially prepared water. The process also required the appropriate totalising natural conditions, such as the heat of the sun, synthesised by the heat of the furnace, and the position of the planets in conjunction with astrological charts. Zosimos, a fourth century A.D. alchemist, sums up transformation: "when all things are brought to agreement by division and union, without neglecting the process, nature is transformed; for nature, returning to herself, transforms herself, and this concerns the quality and the bond of virtue throughout the whole universe", quoted in Gilchrist page 26. That alchemy was concerned not with substances but *stages in processes* is made clear by Charles Nicholl when he states that: "Each stage of this self-devouring, self-generating process bears the name 'Mercury'. Mercury, in short is alchemy itself", quoted on page 43.

The *Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus* is a key alchemic text, probably dating from the 2nd or 3rd century A.D.. The following selected lines contain some dialectical aspects of alchemic thought:

That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of one thing.

And as all things were by the contemplation of one, so all things arose from this one thing by a single act of adaptation.

It is the father of all works throughout the whole world.

If it be cast on to Earth, it will separate the element of Earth from that of Fire, the subtle from the gross.

Again it doth descend to Earth, and uniteth in itself the force from things superior and things inferior.

Thus thou wilt possess the glory of the brightness of the whole world, and all obscurity will fly from thee.

This thing is the strong fortitude of all strength, for it overcometh every subtle thing and doth penetrate every solid substance.

Thus was this world created.

Quoted in Gilchrist, pages 38-39.

Another Hermetic text adopts a totalising vantage point which is reminiscent of the “indescribable” of Jain logic:

Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature; make yourself higher than all heights and lower than all depths, bring together in yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity; think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all this at once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God, quoted in Gilchrist, page 93.

Another aspect of alchemy mentioned in Gilchrist’s book is its link with Baroque music. She argues that “One of the radical innovations in Baroque music was that it deliberately employed the use of sharp successive contrasts, to increase tension and heighten the drama of a piece”, page 78. Stressing the links between alchemic transformation and final resolution in music she quotes Monteverdi, who studied both alchemy and Neo-Platonism, on the need to provoke

conflict: “I was aware that it is contraries that greatly move our mind, and ...this is the purpose which all good music should have”, page 79. She goes on to link the alchemic triad of salt, mercury and sulphur, which correspond to body, soul and spirit, and the double triangles pointing up and down, to the music of Monteverdi. He compares the human passions of anger, moderation and humility with the high, low and middle registers of the voice. These are compared by Gilchrist to triads in other esoteric systems such as the Christian trinity, Neo-Platonism and the Cabbala, which no doubt influenced Fichte, Hegel and other German philosophers for whom the triad was central.

The paradoxical concept of nothingness is mentioned by the metaphysical poet John Donne, who practiced alchemy, in the following:

*Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.*

Quoted on page 111 of Gilchrist.

This section concludes with a detailed example of alchemic dialectics:

By the philosophers I am named Mercurius; my spouse is the (philosophic) gold; I am the old dragon, found everywhere on the globe of the earth, father and mother, young and old, very strong and very weak, death and resurrection, visible and invisible, hard and soft; I descend into the earth and ascend to the heavens, I am the highest and the lowest, the lightest and heaviest; often the order of nature is reversed in me, as regards colour, number, weight and measure; I contain the light of nature; I am dark and light; I come forth from heaven and earth; I am known and yet do not exist at all; by virtue of the sun's rays all colours shine in me and all metals. I am the carbuncle of the sun, the most noble purified earth, through which you may change copper, iron, tin, and lead into gold.

Quoted in Gilchrist, page 45.

The Medieval Dialectic

Christianity encouraged intolerance, bigotry, and religious persecution. It destroyed all conflicting cults with an incredible ferocity. Peasant and scientist, literate and illiterate, all had to share, willingly or not, the same basic beliefs. Nothing less than rigorous conformity was demanded, Barnes (1965) page 307.

After the collapse of the western half of the Roman empire much of Europe went into what is often called the Dark Ages; this involved a move from the towns back to the country, and some centuries later the rise of feudalism. Much of northern Europe was ruled by the Holy Roman Empire which, despite its grand title, was by and large an amalgamation of small local rulers. To the extent that the rulers of the Dark Ages and the middle ages entertained thoughts of imperial expansion and the Roman Catholic Church was the only institution which united the various states of northern Europe, the rulers of the Empire generally aligned themselves with the Church. For around a thousand years an uneasy system of 'dual power' existed between the papacy and the Empire. There was alternate accord and struggle between these two polarities, as between local rulers and their aristocracy, and between lords and peasants. The threat of excommunication was the Church's main weapon in the struggle, it had to be taken seriously by the monarchs because this would relieve their vassals of their oaths of allegiance and undermine feudal rule. Similarly the attention of the Inquisition had a chastening effect on the intelligentsia, merchants, small manufacturers and others who might challenge papal authority.

As the quote at the beginning of this section suggests, the Church of Rome had many ideological rivals during this long period, and it routinely allied itself with the Empire and brutally suppressed other religions, including Judaism and Islam. The power of the early Church increased with the move by the Roman Emperor from Rome to Constantinople, the resulting political and ideological vacuum being filled by the Bishop of Rome. The thinking of the Roman Catholic priest class developed in the course of its early battles against "pagan" rivals and its own "heretics". The Church won these early battles, according to Barnes (1965), because of the priest class's organization, its roots in the urban masses and middle classes, and its strict discipline. The key Catholic doctrine was a static version of the more dialectical

Zoroastrian duality between good and evil; with its counterparts God and the Devil, and heaven and hell. There developed a synthesis composed of the arbitrary jealous war God of the Old Testament writings and the God of love of the abbreviated New Testament canon.

However, it was clear to the scholars, especially those educated in the liberal atmosphere of the schools, that the texts, beginning with the creation account in Genesis, contains numerous contradictions. Evans (1990) paraphrases Aristotle when she says of the medieval view: “In a contradiction one premise signifies what is as it is, and the other signifies what is not as though it were”, page 79. The mass of doctrinal contradictions are captured well in the following extract from Mark Twain’s *The Mysterious Stranger*, quoted in Barnes page 312:

A God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave His angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required His other children to earn it; who gave His angels painless lives, yet cursed His other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice and invented hell; who mouths mercy - and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none Himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tried to shuffle the responsibility for man’s acts upon man, instead of honourably placing it where it belonged, upon Himself; and, finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship Him.

As Evans (1990) points out, the mediation of literal biblical meaning by allegory and symbolism, notably, for example, in the anthropomorphic garden of Eden myth in the early chapters of Genesis, along with problems of translation and errors in copying, only served to compound the contradictions. Religious suffering, such as the fear of hell fire and eternal damnation, and the threat of excommunication, torture and death, tempered the views of most, but by no means all, of the critics and maintained the Church’s social control. The radical intellectuals of the Church by and large sublimated their struggle to overcome the dead hand of the papacy. Some thinkers adopted Neo-Platonist ideas of asceticism and withdrawal, introduced by Augustine in the 4th century. Greek Stoicism, which stressed the annihilation of self, suppression of desire and its replacement by duty to the Church, was adopted by others. An important ideological weapon used by the Church was canon law, based simultaneously on Roman pragmatic and universal ideas of justice, which legitimated the power of the Church

against secular rulers, although the latter used the same Roman law for their own ends. The Church also adopted a stultifying Aristotelian science, with its atomising static mode of classification, dogmatic cosmology, and its claim to finality and definiteness. This in part explains the general backwardness of the Dark Ages and of medieval Christian Europe, especially when compared to the learning of the Islamic world which surrounded it. The formality of, and lack of progress in, the subjects of the quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music), lasted in Europe until the 15th and 16th century.

Chadwick (1990) notes that dialectic was a concept which in medieval times became rather ambiguous. It was usually more or less interchangeable with the term logic, and combined with grammar and rhetoric to form the medieval trivium. This and the quadrivium formed the seven liberal arts, the curriculum of the priest class who largely monopolised northern European learning. The medieval dialectic was taken from Greek thought via Boethius' commentaries. Boethius pioneered the static dialectic's reduction to symbolic form, but also commented on both its limitations and misuses. He was aware of the interpenetration of the "knowing mind and the object of knowledge", Chadwick page 144. Boethius also showed his awareness of the complexity of Aristotle's arguments on contradiction, and applied them to theological contradictions. He quotes Proclus: "If there is a god, whence comes evil? But if there is not, whence comes good?", Chadwick page 129.

The medieval dialectic was used for a number of purposes, including the 'proofs' of God's existence. It was based on both the Socratic form used in Plato's dialogues which, as we have seen, sought after truth in a question and answer style, and on the formal linguistic logic of Aristotle. This technique, along with the rest of the trivium, was taught to pupils in the conservative monasteries, the more liberal schools, and later in the emerging universities at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and elsewhere. It was used by both sides in the bitter debate between conservative realists and the radical nominalists. The debate was a classic example of social struggle taking place in the sublimated form of logic, metaphysics and theology. Realism, which asserted the real existence of static Platonic forms, was defended by the papal orthodox, who aligned themselves with those class interests wanting to maintain their feudal privileges. In contrast the nominalists, who rejected the forms, separated reason and faith and anticipating the rise of empiricism, represented the liberal intelligentsia, scientists and other social forces which were later to form the basis of the capitalist revolution.

Peter Abelard

Peter Abelard (1079-1142), who came from the Breton minor nobility, learned his dialectic from Latin commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* in the lively atmosphere of the cathedral schools. From an early age Abelard:

preferred the weapons of dialectic to all the other teachings of philosophy, and armed with these I chose the conflicts of disputation instead of the trophies of war. I began to travel about in several provinces, disputing like a true peripatetic philosopher wherever I had heard there was keen interest in the art of dialectic, quoted from the *Historia calamitatum*, reproduced in Abelard and Heloise (1974) page 58.

Abelard's decision to become one of a number of paid wandering independent philosophers, dialecticians, disputants and teachers of the wealthy, rather like the Greek Sophists, led to conflicts with the church authorities. His newly found wealth and fame, his public humiliation of his orthodox rivals, his attacks on church corruption and immorality, and his heterodox views, led to some of his work being burned, whilst his reputation and life were threatened by agents of the Inquisition.

Though he knew little Greek, Abelard antagonised the Inquisition by using what he believed to be the divine gifts of logic, or the Greek *logos*, as "weapons of dialectic". He used his dialectic to crush his theological rivals in debates held in the presence of students, a technique pioneered in written form by Erigena. Abelard was aware of Aristotle's three "laws of thought", using them in his disputes and written work to equate theological contradiction with error. His *Sic et Non* controversially set out 158 contradictions in theological texts, and suggested methods for the resolution of just a few of these "sentences", leaving the rest to students. The preface to the work states:

some sayings of the saints seem not only to show discrepancy but even contradiction...We ourselves, again, speaking by the perception of our eyes, call the heavens starry at one moment, and not at another; sometimes we say that the sun is warm, and sometimes not; or, again, that the moon is shining more or less, or even that she hath no light whatsoever; yet these things, in themselves, remain perpetually equal, albeit they appear not equally unto us...Although, in the whole world, there be not any place completely void, not filled with air

or with any corporeal substance, yet we call a chest utterly void when our eye findest nought therein...What wonder, then, if the holy Fathers themselves have sometimes said, or even written, some things according to opinion rather than to truth?...Therefore this present collection is made, as a basis for discussion in the schools, after the fashion recommended by Aristotle to all serious students. For by doubting we come to enquiry, and through enquiry we grasp the truth, as the Truth Himself hath said: 'Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you', Quoted in Coulton (1940), pages 118-120.

One of Abelard's many rivals, Bernard of Clairvaux, responded with the charge that "the secrets of God are ripped open...The Fathers are insulted by men who, instead of understanding them, treat them as contradictories to be reconciled. (Abelard) sees nothing through a glass darkly, but stares at every thing face to face", quoted in Coulton page 113. In short, Bernard argued that Abelard's brand of dialectic was unable to articulate the precise content of the various doctrines. Nye (1990) sums up the Church's response to Abelard when she asks rhetorically:

Wasn't there a grave danger that the substance of faith would be lost in this collection of contradictions on which the logicians would proceed to operate? Might not theological meaning and truth instead depend on depth, nuance, metaphor, continuity of interpretation, all of which were abstracted out of Abelard's opposing propositions? Didn't logic threaten to take away the content of faith and leave only empty forms to be bandied back and forth in a profane contest of wits?, page 88.

Nye draws attention to Abelard's attempt to steer a middle course in the realist-nominalist debate. Whilst his critical instincts made him reject the realist view on universals, he realised that nominalism made the link between words and things, which was vital for his dialectic of form, rather problematic. Abelard's answer to the debate was to go back to something akin to an ancient Egyptian, or Platonic, view which had its origins in tribal thought. It held that that words, such as the universal 'man', had inherent, institutional, or divine meanings linked to the Forms. As Abelard was aware, this position, known as *sprachlogik*, led to the so-called *terminist* criticism, i.e. that words meant different things in different propositions, according to context, and therefore 'fallacies' were often generated in syllogisms because of the ambiguity of the nouns, or terms. The issue of the relationship between language, or thought, and being

was an important medieval theme, and one that we shall return to in the next section on Ockham, and in later chapters.

The specific case of the universal term *man* referred to a being who, unlike the merely human *woman*, contained within it the image of God. Abelard's abstract views on the universal *man* are explored by Nye when she relates them to the social struggles of the period, in particular the struggle between men and women. She refers to the tragic romantic relationship between Abelard and his young, and very able, pupil Heloise. After she became pregnant, Heloise at first refused to accept marriage, arguing that it would damage Abelard's career. Breaking with the conventions of her class, she said that she wanted to be his "mistress" or "whore". Whether men of the cloth should "take a wife or not" was another medieval paradox, only later did the Church absolutely insist on celibacy. Whilst this sort of scandal was a commonplace, the attitude of Heloise was not; her letters to Abelard make it clear that she had no taste for the life of a nun, and later for her life as an abbess. She was more or less forced into this life by Abelard, after his castration by her outraged guardian uncle. Heloise's open acceptance of her love, and sexual desire, for Abelard strikes at the foundations of the Church's attitude to women and marriage.

We can learn more about Abelard's dialectic by studying the correspondence which took place between the separated lovers. She wrote to Abelard in order to discover his true motives in beginning their relationship, in particular she wanted to know whether he felt only lust for her. Lust was an important medieval religious theme, since most men, including the priest class, had difficulty in relating to women in any other way. Abelard at first ignores her specific questions, but later answers her with an example of his dialectic which, though evasive and insulting to Heloise, is revealing of contradictory male medieval attitudes to women and race. In comparing black women to nuns, and using sexual metaphors, Abelard tells us something of his views on these matters and their relationship with religious doctrine. Abelard's first relevant letter begins patronisingly:

I have decided to answer you on each point in turn, not so much in self-justification as for your own enlightenment and encouragement, so that you will more willingly grant my own requests when you understand that they have a basis of reason, Abelard and Heloise, page 137.

His reference to the medieval debate on the relationship between the 'inward' and 'outward' in his discussion of sex, race and God is revealing:

The Ethiopian woman is black in the outer part of her flesh and as regards exterior appearances looks less lovely than other women; yet she is not unlike them within, but in several respects she is whiter and lovelier, in her bones, for instance, or her teeth...for she is blackened outside in the flesh because in this life she suffers bodily affliction through the repeated tribulations of adversity, according to the sayings of the Apostle: 'Persecution will come to all who want to live a godly life as Christians' As prosperity is marked by white, so adversity may properly be indicated by black, pages 138-9.

The 'deductions' which he makes from these 'axioms' involve comparisons between sexual love and Christ's "spiritual bride" and the "self denial" of "foolish virgins". His conclusion is more sober, demanding that Heloise accept her place in the male dominated order of church and state:

Such blackness of bodily tribulation easily turns the minds of the faithful away from love of earthly things and attaches them to the desire for eternal life, often leading them from the stormy life of the world to retirement for contemplation, page 141.

Most of Aristotle's work on logic, and other topics, was unknown during this period within the Christian world, the rest only becoming available, partly via Muslim sources, after Abelard's death. As the orthodox Church intellectuals learned more of Aristotle's logic, they decided to suppress Abelard's more heretical ideas and make Aristotle's propositional logic the basis for the Church's orthodox 'dialectic'. This new 'dialectic' was highly formal, robbed of any real historical content and context it was used to rationalise and justify papal decrees, and the wider interests of the Church in the lawcourt, debating chamber and elsewhere. It is ironic that *Sic et Non* eventually became the means by which the Church sought to articulate and resolve the contradictions pointed out by Biblical exegetes. History is replete with examples of dominant social classes assuaging the views of their critics and integrating them into their own ideology.

William of Ockham and the Coming of Abstract Logic

Aristotelianism, though apparently well-assimilated within the framework of Christian concepts and safeguarded against the exorbitant pretensions of a bolder and bolder Reason, would not fail to create the same peril it was supposed to stave off; it was to become an intellectual vehicle whereby Christianity slipped down the path towards secularity and thus towards oblivion, Kolakowski (1982), page 126.

Nye (1990) describes the fourteenth century as a time of *catastrophe: war, economic upheaval, extremist religious and political views...the terror of the Inquisition...An emerging capitalist economy faltered with uncontrolled inflation and bank failures. Crop harvests caused famine and disease. Workers, both agricultural and urban, staged strikes and sometimes openly revolted in the cities, with populations doubling and tripling, poor sanitation, poverty, and plague took a daily toll of life, and institutional piety was often rejected for ecstatic experiences induced by spellbinding but unauthorized preachers...killing of Jews, persecution of women, pages 102-3 and 118.*

The dual power impasse, referred to earlier, was being resolved in favour of the Emperor. Ockham (1285-1349) and other radicals supported the Emperor in his dispute with the papal establishment, a crime for which Ockham was duly denied his degree at Oxford and charged with heresy. Eventually he was excommunicated and fled to the safe haven of Bavaria. Knowles describes these events as “a decisive moment in the history of European thought, comparable to the secret despatch of Lenin from Switzerland to Petrograd in a sealed train in 1917: ‘Protect me with your sword, and I will defend you with my pen’”, page 320. Ockham was a thinker who, 300 years before Descartes, anticipated the revolutionary ideas of capitalism: the dualistic separation of church and state, radical individualism, and the rise of a scientific managerial class to serve the interests of the merchant and manufacturer.

Ockham defined logic as being about “mental contents that stand for mental contents”, quoted in Nye page 103. He set in motion a movement which believed logic was to be the handmaiden of the first order sciences. This movement anticipated Locke’s underlabouring thesis, claiming that logic was to be used to resolve contradictions and expose fallacies caused by the incorrect use of language. Ockham wanted to “exhibit the general formulae in which

truths can be stated, and lay out the proper form of arguments”, Nye, page 105. The movement was part of the genesis of 20th century formal logic, and the closely related linguistic philosophy, with its use of symbols, positivistic insistence of the singularity of things, and rejection of “essentialist metaphysics”. Crucial to this genesis was Ockham’s anti-metaphysical nominalist stance and his famous “razor”, which involved using only the minimum number of terms demanded for a proposition, equation or model. His supporters, such as Robert Holcot of Cambridge, took these ideas further, and drew the empiricist conclusion that all human knowledge is based on sense-experience. Despite this, Holcot insisted that God could do anything, including the perverse idea that He could command us to hate him. Another follower, Nicholas of Autrecourt, anticipated Hume in stating that cause and effect relationships were no more than generalisations of sense experience.

Ockham tried to resolve some of the classical philosophical problems concerning, for example, universals, opposites and the relation between the concrete and the abstract. We see his static, and symbolic, approach in the following extracts from Bosely and Tweedale (1997): *Whenever one of a pair of opposites really belongs to something in such a way that that something is really characterized by it, whether it belongs to it of itself or through something else, as long as this state of affairs persists unchanged, the other opposite will not really belong to it, but rather will be absolutely denied of it...there is not really any unity besides the unity of singularity*, page 419. *Every A is B. C is not B. Therefore, C is not A...Every human being is per se an animal. No white item is an animal. Therefore, no white is a human being...No difference is common. The nature is common. Therefore, the nature is not a difference*, pages 336-8.

Anticipating Protestant thought Ockham proposed a radical separation between, on the one hand, the world of sense experience, which once created by God is an empirical given and subject to the “laws of thought”, and on the other, the world of God, in which any contradiction is possible because God is absolutely free from the laws of the natural and social world. Nye explains this dualist argument by stating that there is an order and logic to God’s actual creation, although it could have been ordered differently. She explains that “although God cannot make a black thing white, a black thing can be made white by God. That thing which we are referring to as black could have been made white by God, or could be made white by God in the future”, page 112. The idea was anticipated by the eleventh century

thinker Damian who claimed that God's omnipotence enabled Him to "make the past not to have been" and "make contraries (eg being and not-being) true at one and the same time and aspect...though impossible in nature and to man's reason", Knowles pages 96-7.

Ockham anticipates A.J. Ayer in his claim that "God cannot be known by us at all. Hence no demonstrative proof can be given of God's existence...we must be satisfied with what faith and revelation tell us", Knowles page 323. The effect was to curb Papal authority, because it broke with the idea of a totalising all inclusive theology with its "inaccessible, arcane tangles caused by uncontrolled metaphysical speculation", Nye page 110. Ockham rejected medieval realism, because its notion of universals involved the contradiction of a divine creation as recorded in Genesis, alongside a pre-existing Platonic form of man which was eternal. He adopted the modern form of realism which insists "that the universe of being existed, altogether apart from the mind that comes into contact with it", Knowles page 324.

These ideas gradually came to dominate the increasingly secular world of the European intelligentsia. The Catholic writer Knowles is right but one-sided in his estimate of the development of logic:

Thought divorced from life must always wither, and the philosopher of the fourteenth century withdrew more and more into his own world, in which definitions and conclusions were no longer controlled by all other kinds of human experience. Ideas and principles were strained to the limit, and ultimately thought preyed upon itself, and suffered fragmentation, pages 339-40.

The other side, which eludes Knowles, but not Nye, is the historical context of these developments. Specifically it was part of a movement, at the vanguard of which were the Franciscans, to undermine the Papal 'dialectic'. Papal *Realpolitik* sought to justify the Church's vast wealth from taxes, banking, land, licensing of prostitution, selling of penances and indulgences, and other sources, all of which were the antithesis of Christ's poverty and morality. It set the scene for the rise of an independent intelligentsia, and a Protestantism which, consistent with the needs of the rising capitalist class, restricted the church to preaching Sunday sermons. These intellectuals called for the secular state to be given the sole right to maintain an order expressed in terms of a logic consistent with the needs of this new mode of production:

What was not covered in scripture, what was not a matter of faith, what involved men's political and economic life, there expediency and secular powers could rule...If God can rule a contingent world, then so can his surrogate, Man, rule under him. There is no natural order that is necessary or that man in the image of God cannot interrupt, there is no natural law he cannot manipulate. He can create industrial complexes where women and men are worked to death. If Ockham's logic is the logic of a world in which God's will is supreme, it can also become the logic of a world willed by men...in which the last vestiges of spoken words have disappeared, leaving only the formulae of manipulation, Nye pages 120-1.

Mysticism and the dialectic

The numinous quality of the experience - in which the radiance of the world is revealed as never before - transforms ordinary subject-object duality into a new dimension of being, so that there appears to be an absence of self or 'I' for as long as the experience lasts. This is the state of poverty and emptiness described by the mystics of all religions, and to attain this state of being is to discover the meaning of one's own existence, to find one's true place in the flux of life, to identify oneself with, and love, everything that exists.

Bancroft (1979), page 10.

Medieval Christian thought developed a dualist split between what was to become formal logic on the one hand, and a more dialectical mystical approach on the other. As religion's ideological power declined with the rise of capitalism, dialectical analysis normally took second place to a new atomised mode of thought, centred round observation and measurement. The development of the dialectic shifted away from the mainstream in the form of mysticism, which was generally heretical to both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy. The Mystery cults, which as we have seen date back to the Egyptian priests, formed the prototype of the medieval mystics. Masters and their novices developed their radical criticisms of orthodoxy amongst the intellectual élites of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Origen was an important third century precursor of Christian mysticism. His work, like that of many mystics, was 'doctored' for its heretical views, and he was formally declared a heretic in the sixth century. Origen believed that the Bible had both an esoteric and allegorical meaning: its real purpose was to show how humans become God by going through stages of

contemplation, an approach which owed much to tribal and ancient dialectical thought. The “Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God...they have not only an obvious meaning but also another meaning which escapes the notice of most people”, Origen, *First Principles*, quoted in Lane (1984) page 23.

A sixth century Syrian monk, the Pseudo-Dionysius, was also important in the development of mystical dialectics with his notion of the negative way, in opposition to the positive way, a system which came to be known as *negative theology*. He claimed that God was “impossible to conceive in Its ultimate nature...(Mystics) can find no more fitting method to celebrate Its praises than to deny It every manner of attribute”, from *Divine Names*, quoted in Lane page 59. Dionysius’ main work was *The Mystical Theology*, which makes it clear that the text is not intended for the “uninitiated”. He speaks of the “negative method of abstraction”, by which he means “abstracting all attributes in order that without veil, we may know that Unknowing, which is enshrouded under all that is known and all that can be known, and that we may begin to contemplate the superessential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things”, quoted in Happold page 215. He states that God “possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the Universal Cause), yet, in a more strict sense, He does not possess them, since He transcends them all. There is no contradiction between the affirmations and the negations, inasmuch as He infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions” quoted in Happold page 213.

Dionysius’ concept of nothingness as the path to God, influenced John Scotus Erigena, who translated his works into Latin in the ninth century. Erigena believed in something akin to pantheism, being accused of holding the mystical doctrine that eventually humanity will be absorbed into God from whence it emanated. He also believed in a doctrine, which will be expanded on later, that God created the world because He grew tired of contemplating himself in his nothingness: “And what, O Lord, is that coming of yours but an ascent through the infinite steps of your contemplation?...not what you are, but what you are not, and that you are”, from *Division of Nature*, quoted in Lane page 87.

Having examined some of doctrines of the early Christian mystics we can now analyse the social struggles and dialectical thought of the most important mystics in more depth.

Meister Eckhart

...all time is contained in the present Now-moment. Eckhart (1941) page 212.

*The soul has two eyes - one looking inwards and the other looking outwards. It is the inner eye of the soul that looks into essence and takes being directly from God. That is its true function. The soul's external outward eye is directed toward creatures and perceives their external forms...*Eckhart (1941), page 216.

All creatures are pure nothing. I do not say that they are a trifle or they are anything: they are pure nothing. All creatures have no being, for their being consists in the presence of God, Eckhart, quoted in Smith (1987) page 68.

Being is God. This proposition is obvious, in the first place, because if being is something different from God, God does not exist and there is no God. For how can he exist, or how can anything exist, if there is another existence foreign and distinct from being?...Beyond being and before being there is nothing. Therefore, if being is other than God or foreign to God, God would be nothing. Eckhart, quoted in Kolakowski page 29.

It seemed to a man as in a dream - it was a waking dream - that he became pregnant with Nothing, like a woman with child. And in the Nothing God was born: He was the fruit of Nothing. Eckhart, quoted in Smith page 11.

(God is) the negation of the negation, Eckhart, quoted in Smith page 121.

Eckhart (c1260-1328) was a Dominican monk who rose through the ranks of the Order, becoming known for his administrative and preaching skills. Studying in Paris, hence his title Meister, he learned much from Muslim thinkers and the representatives of the various heretical movements of his day. Eckhart became a renowned disputer, and therefore was aware of the bitter debates on dialectics, considered earlier. At the height of his fame he returned to Cologne, a centre of dissent where he possessed a large following. However, the humanist, pantheist, alchemic transmutationist, magical and bold paradoxical Neo-Platonist aspects of his preaching angered the Franciscan Archbishop of Cologne. The latter called on the services of

the famous Franciscan debater John Duns Scotus to inveigh against Eckhart in his own college. When this failed to stop Eckhart, the Archbishop decided to charge him with heresy, because he “incited ignorant and undisciplined people to wild and dangerous excesses”, quoted on page xxii of Blakney’s introduction to Meister Eckhart (1941). In response to Eckhart’s contradictory ideas, such as the line in his 28th Sermon: “Therefore I pray God that he may quit me of god”, Blakney remarks that the masses listening to this “shook their heads, for they did not understand, or perhaps they understood only too well”, page xxiii. Blakney explains that:

Theology was, to the medieval man, what politics is to us today. The issues involved were of immediate, heated, and personal interest and just as people today may be punished for political views and propaganda believed inimical to some government or state, wrong theological views, considered inimical to the church, could be punished then. A Franciscan would be only too glad to lend himself to the punishment of a Dominican, as Meister Eckhart discovered, page xviii.

Blakney is correct but one-sided in his assessment of medieval theology; as we saw at the beginning of the chapter theological struggles relate to concrete struggles, albeit often in a complex way. Several commentators noted how Papal excesses, those of John XXII in this case, were not commented upon directly by Eckhart but are implicit in his mystical thought. The poverty of Christ and the apostles was in sharp contradiction to the wealth of the papacy, which was a major issue for the dissidents, 114 of whom were burned during John’s papacy for pointing out this contradiction. John, who was “more worldly than a pimp”, De Rosa (1989), page 296, was reckoned to spend 70% of his large income from simony on armaments: “The blood he shed would have incarnadined (stained - S.S.) the waters of Lake Constance, and the bodies of the slain would have bridged it from shore to shore”, page 296. John “burned the poorest of Christ’s poor and died the richest man in the world”, page 301.

Kolakowski (1982) explains that despite Eckhart’s rise up the church bureaucracy, such a mystic “does not need human intermediaries, his communication with the Lord is direct and therefore he may imagine - as many did - that he is free to dispense with the aid of ministers. For a radical mystic who believes that the only proper way to God is to search for Him in one’s own heart and to ‘taste’ Him in unmediated encounter, priests and indeed the entire ecclesiastical organism are a matter of indifference, or may even be regarded as a hindrance to

real contact”, page 104. Eckhart conducted his own defence against the charge of heresy, recorded in *The Defence*, and appealed to the Pope, which led to a second trial at Avignon, the home of the alternative papacy. The death of Eckhart came before John XXII issued his condemnation; only for the Pope himself to be condemned by his successor. Hebblethwaite sums up the situation: “Thus we have a heretical Pope who denounces as a heretic Eckhart, whose work he had not read and whose defence he had not heard”, quoted in Smith page 9.

The Benedictine monk and Catholic apologist Cyprian Smith fails to realise the extent of the corruption of the Church during the 13th and 14th centuries, and its importance to the trial of Eckhart. However, Smith, as is clear from the title of his book *The Way of Paradox*, is aware that dialectics is an important aspect of the Christian mystical tradition, of which Eckhart is a key figure. He describes Eckhart’s writings as being “many sided”, using “daring paradoxes”, containing a vision which is based on “a tension of opposites...culminating in the figure of Christ, in whom the tension reaches its maximum point and achieves its reconciliation, both in history and the human heart...When we say ‘tension’, again we are talking the language of power, for tension generates energy”, pages ix-x and 55. As an example, Eckhart says: “the one is always in the other: that which embraces is that which is embraced, for it embraces nothing but itself”, quoted on page 61 of Smith.

The profound impulses to exercise virtue and the contradictory ones to commit sin are considered by Eckhart in his *Talks of Instruction*. This is the theological language which he uses to articulate the conflicting impulses which are experienced by all in a mode of production based on exploitation. Eckhart says:

Because of the impulse to evil and the excitement of it, both virtue and its rewards are in travail born. The impulse to wrong makes us the more diligent in the exercise of virtue, driving us to it with a strong hand, like a hard taskmaster, forcing us to take shelter in doing well. The weaker one is, the more he is warned to strength and self-conquest; for virtue, like vice, is a matter of the will, Eckhart (1942) page 12.

Eckhart’s German Sermons are often cited as examples of his dialectical thought, and Sermon 16 contains the passage:

Heaven itself is eternal in its course and knows nothing about time. That means that the soul, too, consists of pure Being - but then, too, there are opposites in the soul. What are these

opposites? Good and evil, white and black are such opposites, which, however, are not part of Being...the soul is purified in the practice of virtues by which we climb to a life of unity. That is the way the soul is made pure - by being purged of much divided life and by entering upon a life that is (focused to) unity. The whole scattered world of lower things is gathered up to oneness when the soul climbs up to that life in which there are no opposites. Entering the life of reason, opposites are forgotten, but where this light does not fall, things fall away to death and destruction, pages 172-3 of Eckhart.

Smith further explains Eckhart's dialectics:

Having made a statement, Eckhart will often go on to deny it; but the truth lies neither in the affirmation nor in the denial, but in the tug-of-war between the two. This is baffling for the normal human mind, which works on the logical Principle of Contradiction, according to which a proposition cannot be both true and false at one and the same time. But, according to Eckhart, that is exactly what the highest truth is. It transcends the Principle of Contradiction, and can be grasped only through paradox...it is not to deny or destroy the human mind with nonsense but to bring the normal human intellect to the awareness of its own limitations, and thus open it up to the possibility of a higher kind of knowing, page 27.

To illustrate this on pages 39-40 Smith takes examples from Eckhart's work which attracted the Church's attention:

If I say that God is good, that is not true. God is not good; I am good. And if I say that God is wise, that is not true. I am wiser than He is...Therefore I pray God, that He may rid me of God.

Smith is aware that for Eckhart "the question of God is at the same time a question about Man", page 4. However, for his own reasons Smith avoids the full extent of the humanist basis of Eckhart's theology; despite the fact that he is aware that spiritual knowledge "catches God off his guard, naked, 'in his dressing-room' as Eckhart puts it" page 23.

The dialectic between the inner and outer is even more important for Eckhart than it was for Abelard, for as Smith explains:

If, as we penetrate further towards the centre, images and symbols arise, promises of new desires and new possibilities, they are to be ignored and passed by, until the Central Core is

reached, where we can become rooted and grounded in God. Then, strengthened and enlightened by that, we can ascend slowly to the light, unlocking caverns and treasures on our way, if that seems right. But the first prerequisite is to find God in the deepest core of ourselves, and this is done by detachment, by letting go of all in us that is not God, until a spark of awareness awakens in us, which Eckhart calls 'the Birth of God in the soul'...As this process goes on, the spark of consciousness steadily grows until it gradually illuminates the whole mind. It is the work of a lifetime, pages 12-13.

As we shall see, Hegel learned much from this “cool, radiant, light and airy”, Smith page 15, mystical explanation of the search for what Eckhart calls “unmediated spiritual knowledge”. It is clear from the quotes at the start of the section, that Eckhart was interested in the dialectic of being and nothingness, and of the subject-object relationship; in particular, each side of these polarities presumes the other. Smith provides the following final example of Eckhart’s thought:

There can be no Word without a Silence from which it emerges, which it expresses and to which it returns. It is precisely this Silence, this Depth which makes it 'true' and able to communicate...Silence is one of the most dreaded realities in a world of empty, false words, because silence leads us into the depths of ourselves. Yet no word, however eloquent it may seem, can have real depth, truth, or power to communicate, unless it arises from silence - unless it expresses, rather than obliterates that silence, page 59.

Mysticism, dialectics and logic

Warner (1992) contains two readings, under the title of *The Logic of Mysticism*, which reveal analytical philosophers’ outrage at the dialectics of mysticism. McCabe’s article begins with the following:

This title represents, I suppose, a kind of challenge; for there seems at first sight some incompatibility between the practice of logic and mysticism, a contrast between the rational and the intuitive, the tough minded and the tender-minded, page 45.

Barrett’s article is stronger in its tone:

To talk of a logic of mysticism may sound distinctly odd. If anything, mysticism is alogical; it would be uncharitable if not false, on mature consideration, to call it illogical - though

many, without due deliberation, might be tempted to use that term. Wittgenstein comes close to calling it illogical...he does not accuse the mystics or prophets or religious teachers of contradicting themselves or of invalid reasoning. What he accuses them of may be something worse, namely, talking nonsense, of not giving sense to the words they use or the expressions they utter. Russell and Ayer come to much the same conclusion but by a different route, page 61.

Commenting on Jesus' dialectical remark, in Matthew x:39, that "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it", Barrett says:

These statements are written off as paradoxes, modes of speech or tropes which appear to be contradictory but in fact are not, since the meanings of words change in midstream. This in itself is not logically very nice, but it will just about pass, since finding and losing life does not mean dying and being restored to mortal life. It is a close thing, page 61.

Similarly in response to Eckhart's claim that "all creatures are pure nothing" Barrett states:

Surely here is a contradiction. A creature, to be a creature, must be something. A non-existent creature is no creature at all...But what it amounts to saying is that Eckhart was trying to express the inexpressible. This led him to saying what, on the face of it, was absurd and nonsensical, verging on, if not over the edge of, the illogical, page 62.

Barrett, like most analytical philosophers, is unable to contemplate the existence of real, or internal, contradiction. He claims that contradictions can be explained as either the result of figurative or exaggerated language, that is the rhetorical devices of trope or hyperbole, or of giving a word different meanings and moving from one meaning to the other. Whilst dialecticians use rhetorical devices, analogies and shifting meanings, they do so in an attempt to articulate what analytical philosophy cannot accept: i.e. the existence of *real* contradictions in the social and natural world.

Although Kolakowski (1982) neglects to point out the social context of Eckhart's thought, he rightly claims that Cusa, whose work will be examined in the next chapter, learned much from him. In contrast to the claims of the analytical philosophers, they both:

speak of a higher cognitive faculty, Reason or Intellect, which affords us insight into the divine infinity and which is guided by principles of its own, principles which, on closer inspection, turn out to be opposed to, rather than to supplement, the rules of common logic, whether or not this contradiction is explicitly stated...knowledge about God, whether gained in contemplation or through speculative effort, lies beyond the power of language and appears paradoxical...the Oneness of Being confronted with a created world consisting of many objects...I cannot think of God without falling into contradiction, consequently I cannot think of God without denying His existence...We are tempted to escape the contradiction by denying not God's existence but the existence of the world: many is One...mystics knew they were challenging common logic and impertinently refused to surrender...They believe they have really lived 'temporarily in eternity'...it is possible to achieve identity with God without forfeiting one's own personal life, pages 138-43.

At the core of mysticism is an occult doctrine which profoundly influenced Hegel's formulation of the dialectic. It attempts to resolve the major theological contradictions by rejecting the *prima facie* omnipotence of God. Kolakowski quotes Origen: "God himself cannot be called 'omnipotent' without the existence of subjects over which he may exercise his power; and therefore in order that God may be displayed as 'omnipotent' it is essential that everything should subsist", page 146. There is an implied radical interpretation of Eckhart when Kolakowski quotes Sebastian Franck: "Properly speaking, God in himself is nothing. He is without will, effects, without time, place, person and names. He becomes something in creatures, so that only through them does he receive existence", page 149. In other words, explains Kolakowski, God

is not at the beginning what He will be at the end of the great journey. He begets the world in order to ripen it in its body, as it were; he has to make something alien to Himself and to see Himself in the mirror of finite minds and when He reabsorbs again His alienated products He grows richer; the magnificent and terrifying history of the world is God's own history...the mystery of man and the mystery of God are blended: they have, as it were, a common itinerary and a common destiny, they need each other in the voyage towards the ultimate reconciliation...original sin...had been committed first by God, who tore Himself asunder in emanating the universe...its substance was taken up in the grandiose panorama of Hegel's historical ontology: the drama of an Absolute Being which, not satisfied with its empty self-identity, alienates itself and, through the struggles and tragedies of human history,

matures to a perfect self-consciousness, re-assimilates its products and eventually abolishes the distinction of subject and object without destroying the wealth of forms which emerged on the way, pages 146-7.

Sufism and dialectics

The mystic call is as a rule the result of an inner rebellion of the conscience against social injustices, Louis Massignon, quoted in Armstrong (1994) page 260.

The East is in the West and the West is in the East - there are no points in the compass of the soul, Soichi Saito, quoted in the Foreward to Bammate (1962).

For the idea in Muslim art is not to idolise images, but to go beyond, to the One who makes them move as in a magic lantern or a shadow play, towards the only One who endures, Watt and Cachia (1965) page 75.

In God alone do freedom, action and truth coincide, Burckhardt (1991) page 52.

During the middle ages Moorish Spain, *al-Andalus*, was the most technically and culturally advanced nation in what is today called Europe. The magnificent architectural remains bear witness to the diverse cultures, including a major Jewish input, which contributed to this achievement. "The scientific renown of the Muslims had spread far and wide, and attracted the intellectual elite of the Western World", Bammate page 17; even the future Pope Sylvester II studied in Toledo for 3 years. It was in this atmosphere that heretical Islamic, and Judaic, mysticism developed, nominally as a reaction against religious orthodoxy, but in reality as an attack on the totality of social relations from the vantage point of the radical intellectual.

Watt and Cachia (1965) offer an explanation of the purpose of the Muslim expansion from the small state of Medina in the 630s, which later led to the colonisation of most of North Africa and Spain. The expansion was an attempt at resolving the contradiction of the strain on food supplies for the nomadic Arabs, who lived by moving their animals to areas of the desert where pasture was possible after rain. The contradiction intensified during the period of Arab unity, a unity central to the Islamic project, because the loss of life, which occurred as a result

of tribal and other fighting over scarce resources, largely ended upon unification. This meant that as the population grew the meagre resources of the desert became inadequate for the Arabs' subsistence needs. The *jihad*, or holy war, was therefore a religious sublimation of the need for resources, which were at first obtained by occasional raids into Syria and Iraq. As the *jihad* spread westwards towards Spain, conquered peoples, who included Arabs, Berber tribes, Christians and Jews, were in some cases forced to convert. Many Berbers refused to convert and were killed, but those who did convert enjoyed a tense relationship with the Muslim Arabs; tensions also existed amongst the different Arab tribes.

Muslims believed they were the rejuvenators of a corrupted Judeo-Christian tradition, from which they took the Jewish idea of prophethood and Christian proselytising, adding aspects of Gnosticism and other cults. Monotheist subjects of the empire were in many cases allowed to become "protected groups", and were granted limited autonomy in return for payment of taxes and tributes. The income thus generated provided stipends for Muslim soldiers, who later became a military caste, to garrison invaded territories and continue their expansion through North Africa and into Spain. The masses of Spain suffered a worse life under Visigoth rule than they previously experienced under the Romans. Therefore they, along with the Jewish traders, supported the Muslim invasion, with its superior culture and technology. Because Muslims were not subject to taxes and levies the pressure for conversion to Islam ceased, as the more converts the greater the loss of revenue for the Muslim authorities.

Although it continued to possess links with the rest of the Muslim world, *al Adalus* became a separate emirate in the 8th century. It was dominated by southern traders and merchants and protected by a largely slave and mercenary army. The army was fully occupied quelling frequent rebellions, which later led to the division of the emirate, and to raids into France, that protected its northern borders. The south of the country was gradually urbanised and developed a complex class structure, whereas the north was based on the feudal system which was developing in Christian Europe. The religious struggles in the urbanised south, which, with its advanced division of labour was the envy of Europe, were in reality social struggles, at the centre of which was the court, the merchants and competing groups of jurists.

From the eleventh century, which saw the rise of Berber dynasties, there was a gradual weakening of the Muslim state of *al Andalus*, and its eventual collapse in the mid 13th

century. However, during its heyday the various jurists, particularly those based in Cordova with its famous library, dominated intellectual life. They strengthened their power base by supporting *jihād*, so as to increase the standing of the local ruler, claiming the right to control the penal system, civil society, and political society. This claim was based on their particular interpretation of the *Quran* and *Sharia*, or revealed law, in “the Islamic world politics was carried on wholly within the framework of religious ideas”, Watt page 89. Jurists travelled to all parts of the empire as students and teachers, and some were profoundly interested in philosophy. The various philosophies were synthesised with their respective views on jurisprudence, ethics and theology.

Of the various groups of jurists and other groups of intellectuals the most radical were the mystics, the most famous of whom were the Sufis. Al-Ghazali was an early famous Sufi, who, long before Eckhart, propagated the idea of direct union with God. According to the orthodox, mystic union had to be limited to what Baldick (1989) calls “togetherness” or “conjunction”, because anthropomorphism and pantheism were declared heretical, though many Sufis were charged with this crime. Sufi culture, which was the model for later Jewish mysticism, is one of esoteric knowledge, secrecy and initiation. Some Sufis displayed elements of monasticism and Freemasonry, whilst others engaged in practices in bold contradiction with Muslim orthodoxy.

When the Islamic expansion reached Alexandria in 641, Neo-Platonist philosophy, which dominated the intelligentsia of the city, was acknowledged as the most advanced form of thought. Along with various Greek systems, including that of the dialectician Empedocles, a synthesis of Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Shamanist and other religious ideas spread amongst Muslim thinkers, and later became the basis for the Sufi interpretation of the *Quran*. Sufis tended to be limited to small groups, because they were, like the Neo-Platonists, usually scornful of and separate from the labouring masses, although there were notable exceptions. The renowned Sunni philosopher Ibn Rushd engaged in a bitter polemic with the Sufi, Mohammad al-Ghazali, during which each had their books burned. Typically the protagonists in these debates openly sought a power base by supporting the emir or religio-political leaders, the *imams*. As the fortunes of the leaders rose and fell so did those of the jurists and philosophers, and Ibn Rushd went from court philosopher to exile and back to court again.

The Sufis usually opted for a Neo-Platonist life of contemplative withdrawal in Cordova, away from the court intrigues, conspicuous consumption and growing disorder which marked the south of *al Andalus*. However, Sufi mysticism covers a wide range of theories and practices, including the heretical humanist views of the Salimiyya who “allegedly taught that God would be seen in human form by men (even the unbelievers) and in animal form by animals”, Baldick page 52. Love, and the inter-subjectivity which it involves is another controversial Sufi theme: “The lovers of God reach either unitive fusion with him...or the ‘station’ of experiencing God’s Uniqueness...which means reaching him, so that he seems both to be and not be in and through everything”, Baldick page 57. In the work of Ahmed al Ghazali, not to be confused with his more famous brother Mohammad, there unfolds a dialectical relationship between the triad Love, Lover and Beloved, in which the last two are derived from the first: ”Audacious paradoxes arise. The lover is closer to the Beloved’s beauty than the Beloved is, and even thinks that he himself is the Beloved. When one passes away from one’s self, one can go beyond a famous black light which tells the mystic that his journey is almost at an end”, Baldick pages 66-67.

Ibn ‘Arabi

Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) moved to the city of Seville during the final period of Islamic Spain. He learned all he could from the jurists, alchemists, magicians, astrologers and philosophers of *al Andalus* before travelling to North Africa. But increasing political and social chaos made him travel East to Mecca in his mid thirties, and then to Cairo “where his teachings encountered much hostility and his life was threatened”, Baldick page 83. His vast output of writing, notably the *Meccan Revelations*, synthesised the works of the earlier Sufis, and he became acknowledged as their greatest thinker. Ibn ‘Arabi, who is compared to Hegel and Spinoza by Baldick, takes up a number of Sufi themes which later proved important to the dialectical formulations of Christian and Jewish mystics.

The much discussed distinction between *stages* and *stations*, which are recognisable as Hegelian *moments*, are terms taken from alchemy. “Passing away and survival”, perhaps influenced by early Christian ideas on “annihilation”, is a final station, where in some versions the lower soul disappears giving way to the heart. The lower soul is part of a Neo-Platonist triad of moments, along with the intellect and the heart, and the latter negates itself into Spirit.

Baldick explains how in this mode of thought, which influenced Sufi poetry and later turned up in the sermons of Meister Eckhart, “man first realises, both intellectually and in experience, that his apparent, individual and temporal existence is really non-existence (since it is borrowed from God and not really owned by man), and then turns away, abandoning this negation of his existence, to the positive apprehending of real existence in God. In this one can see the celebrated ‘negation of the negation’...Muhammad is credited with the saying ‘Die before you die!’ “, page 45.

The extent to which Ibn ‘Arabi’s dialectical thought influenced Sufis down to the present is clear in the work of the orthodox Burckhardt (1991), who constantly uses both his own dialectical prose and metaphors, and quotes that of the master. We read of the dialectic between the One and the many, essence and appearance, form (archetype) and matter, positive and negative, quantitative and qualitative, potential and actual, interpenetrating polarities, alchemic moments and the microcosm as the macrocosm in miniature. The metaphors of ‘Arabi include the prism, or mirror, radiating light from the One to the many, and the hub of a wheel as the One radiating the spokes of the many, and similarly with eagles, peacocks and white doves. The adoption, and development, of Neo-Platonism by Ibn ‘Arabi means “that reality is regarded according to different orders of continuity depending upon the point of view adopted or imposed on us by the very nature of things, and metaphysics alone can embrace all these various perspectives and give to each its proper place in that web of visions, the universe”, Burckhardt page 35. Similarly dialectical thinking is displayed on page 40: “Now any reflection implies a certain inversion in relation to its source: spiritual poverty...is, for example, the inverse reflection of the Plenitude of the Spirit...In these ‘positive’ virtues the inversion lies in the mode and not in the content, which means that they are, as it were, saturated with humility while their prototypes are made of majesty and glory”. As we shall see, Feuerbach and Marx were to make use of inversion analogies in their dialectical approach to religion.

As we have seen, there is an heretical essence in all forms of mysticism, and Ibn Arabi’s views are no exception. His more heretical ideas were suppressed by the authorities, such as his call for a coming together of all religious faiths, which he believed were merely different paths to God. Important to the history of dialectics was his mystical interpretation of the statement in the Koran (2:32) that “God had created Adam in his own image so that he could contemplate

himself as in a mirror”, Armstrong (1994), page 264, which may have influenced the Kabbalah mystics. Most mystics have given a central place to the idea of nothing in their systems: “Human beings are the only animals who have the capacity to envisage something that is not present or something that does not yet exist but which is merely possible...The idea of God, however it is defined, is perhaps the prime example of an absent reality which, despite its inbuilt problems, has continued to inspire men and women for thousands of years”, Armstrong page 269. Whilst this is a useful observation, it is difficult to agree with Armstrong’s implied claim that animals are unaware of absence; pets, for example, being profoundly aware of their owner’s absence. The concepts of nothingness, identity and emptiness which for mystics are expressions of God, made a profound impression on Ibn ‘Arabi who “imagined the solitary God sighing with longing but this sigh was not an expression of maudlin self-pity. It had an active, creative force which brought the whole of our cosmos into existence; it also exhaled human beings, who became *logoi*, words that express God to himself”, Armstrong pages 273-4.

Rumi’s dialectic

..the purpose of the five senses is to induce the individual to seek this hidden wisdom...God has made the outer worlds appear real; and he has made the inner worlds seem unreal. But these are disguises, since the opposite is true, Rumi (1998) page 23.

The accumulation of wealth, which resulted from the vast Muslim empire, caused a reaction whereby spiritual teachers advocated the renunciation of wealth and a return to a simple existence devoted to the attainment of wisdom. One Sufi explained that people should “detach themselves from things, and attach themselves to the Lord of things”; and another said “Sufism is to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing”, both quotes from van der Weyer’s introduction to Rumi (1998) page 9. These principles underpinned the formation of Sufi lodges in Persia in order to provide free food and shelter to those in need. Out of this movement sprang the 13th century poet-philosopher Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, who came from a family of well-born orthodox scholars. Rumi was disturbed the excessive wealth and lack of spirituality in Baghdad, the ancient capital of the Muslim empire. Under the influence of the Sufi teacher Shams, Rumi rejected orthodox Islam and became a mystic, often participating in

ecstatic skipping and dancing. This unorthodox behaviour became central to the faith of the Whirling Dervishes, a form of Sufism which survives today in Persia and Turkey.

Rumi's work was collected in a tome, the *Masnavi*, which features much dialectical thinking, including the unorthodox doctrine that God possesses two contradictory characteristics mercy and anger. These forces are in constant tension, though mercy normally triumphs. Rumi takes up the essence-appearance dialectic when he says: "there is the inner world which many people deny, and is invisible to the senses, and yet is real and eternal...How long will you be besotted with the shape of the jug? Look inside for the water. How long will you stare at the shell? Look inside, and pick out the pearl", page 21. "The external is at war with the internal – as if the shell were at war with the pearl it contains. The external says: 'I am this and no more.' The internal says: 'Look closely, and you will find me.' The external says: 'The internal is an illusion.' The internal says: 'Just wait, and I shall reveal myself'", page 22.

On strife and contradiction, which due to the activities of Genghis Khan's army was never far from his life, Rumi says: "The task of life is to bring harmony between opposites. Strife between opposites is destructive; harmony between opposites is creative. God wants the sheep and the lion to live in peace...Opposites may seem to be in conflict; but in truth opposites depend on one another...You cannot recognise evil as evil until you have experienced goodness, You discern something through its opposite", pages 42-4. He continues by sublimating social struggle into natural struggle: "Nation is set against nation in the pursuit of power and wealth...To understand the conflict with God's creation, look at the four elements. The four elements are like four sturdy pillars holding up the roof of heaven. Yet each pillar tries to destroy another – such as water, puts out fire. So creation is built on opposites; and these inevitably are at war...the existence of harmony presupposes the possibility of conflict", pages 66-7.

Jewish Mystical Thought

But when we reach the number nine we cannot progress farther without returning to the unity, or the number one, for the number ten is but a repetition of unity freshly derived from the negative, as is evident from a glance at its ordinary representation in Arabic numerals...In this number are the other nine hidden. It is indivisible, it is also incapable of

multiplication; divide 1 by itself and it still remains 1, multiply 1 by itself and it is still 1 and unchanged. Thus it is a fitting representative of the great unchangeable Father of all...and thus forms , as it were, the link between the negative and the positive...Thus, then, we obtain a duad composed of 1 and its reflection. Now also we have the commencement of a vibration established, for the number 1 vibrates alternatively from changelessness to definition, and back to changelessness again. Thus, then, is it the father of all numbers, and a fitting type of the Father of all things, McGregor Mathers (1991) pages 20-23.

The pure flame of monotheism may of course be kept alive in an unsuccessful tribe which is not completely extinguished. Thus the Jews, situated on the main trade route of early civilisation and harried and battered on all sides, were compressed into a proud, prickly, bigoted society whose difficult economic life is reflected in their religion. But this very battering toughened them; and made of Judaism a consciousness which, as events proved, was to possess great survival value in the maelstrom of social relations of the East, Caudwell page 39.

It is a commonplace to comment upon the social struggles and profound contradictions of the Jewish people. This can be traced from their tribal beginnings, through the destruction of Jerusalem, their achievements in Spain from where they were exiled by Christians in 1492, the many pogroms, the holocaust to the present situation in Israel, a Middle East local superpower dependent on U.S. patronage. Marx's famous 1843 article *On the Jewish Question*, contained in Marx (1975), is very dialectical, if lacking in historical detail, in its style of presentation, and contains some useful material on the social contradictions of the Jewish people. Marx's ancestors had originally come from Spain, hence his nickname *Moor*. He had Rabbis in his family, although his father converted to Christianity for economic reasons. Throughout most of the medieval period European Jews had been marginalised; many converted to avoid persecution or to improve their economic prospects, but the rest were largely restricted to money lending and trade. As Halevi (1979) explains: "A person is born into and under the laws of a very tough physical existence, where he has to learn the arts and sciences of survival before he is ready to study Kabbalah", page 20. "How can you expect me to be perfect...when I am full of contradictions?" asks one Spanish Jewish mystic, quoted on page 22.

Scholem (1971) argues that after the fall, in which social exclusion is idealised as Adam's sin, the Kabbalists sought an "inward home" via the ladder of descent and ascent. He says anthropocentrically: "The primal flaw must be mended so that all things can return to their proper place, to their original posture. Man and God are partners in this enterprise. After the original breaking God began the process of reparation, but He left its completion to man", page 46. This contrasts with a more secular Russian Kabbalist who points out that "If one can think of business during prayer, then one can pray whilst doing business", Halevi page 25. Jewish mystics from Maimonides of the twelfth century to Don Baer of Lubavich of the 19th century constantly refer to business. Jacobs (1990) points out that masters of the Kabbalah make it clear that initiates were supposed to have been successful in business before turning to the esoteric path to God. But to truly understand the "Jewish question" requires a study of the concrete circumstances of a given historical period with a dialectical mode of presentation:

The form in which the Jewish question is posed differs according to the state in which the Jew finds himself. In Germany, where there is no political state, no state as such, the Jewish question is a purely theological question. The Jew is in religious opposition to the state, which acknowledges Christianity as its foundation...In France in the constitutional state...the relationship of the Jew to the state also retains the appearance of a religious theological opposition...Civil society ceaselessly begets the Jew from its own entrails. What was the essential basis of the Jewish religion? Practical need, egoism. The monotheism of the Jew is therefore in reality the polytheism of the many needs, a polytheism that makes even the lavatory an object of divine law...The god of the Jews has been secularized and become the god of the world. Exchange is the true god of the Jew. His god is nothing more than illusionary exchange. The view of nature which has grown up under the regime of private property and of money is an actual contempt for and practical degradation of nature which does exist in the Jewish religion but only in an imaginary form...the chimerical nationality of the Jew is the nationality of the merchant, of the man of money in general...As soon as society succeeds in abolishing the empirical essence of Judaism - the market and the conditions which give rise to it - the Jew will have become impossible, for his consciousness will no longer have an object, the subjective basis of Judaism - practical need - will have become humanized and the conflict between man's individual existence and his species-

existence will have been superseded. The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism, Marx (1975), pages 216 and 238-241.

Through 'Throne Mysticism', which developed in the 2nd and 3rd century, Jews expressed their desire "to turn away from a world in which they were persecuted and marginalised to a more powerful divine realm...it was finally incorporated into Kabbalah, the new Jewish mysticism, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries", Armstrong (1994) page 245. It was perhaps Jewish mystics of the middle ages who reflected most profoundly, albeit in a 'fantastic' way, on the marginal and highly contradictory social position of the Jew. Such a position is clear in an 11th century Spanish mystical text which speaks of the man "Whose divided heart wrestles with itself", quoted in Halevi, page 19. The written work of the mystics was read by Jews in the ghettos, and by intellectuals of all faiths and none. Because of its advanced cultural level during the early, or Muslim, part of the medieval period, it is no surprise that Spanish Jews were at the forefront of the development of the *Zohar* and other writings which formed the esoteric tradition, or "reception", called the Kabbalah.

The Kabbalah developed dialectics to a higher level than any other form of mystical thought, using a synthesis of Egyptian mystery, Hebrew tribal religion, Christian and Muslim mystical ideas, neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism, astrology, alchemy, Pythagorean numerology and other traditions. *The Book of Concealed Mystery* is a key text in the *Zohar*, and illustrates perfectly the synthesis of these diverse elements to produce profoundly dialectical passages. The text speaks of "the equilibrium of contraries", which as McGregor Mathers' introduction explains, represents the balance which forms the third part of a triad where the other two parts are opposing forces, such as light and shade. The introduction sounds very Hegelian, but is faithful to the spirit of the text when stating that:

To define negative existence clearly is impossible, for when it is distinctly defined it ceases to be negative existence; it is then negative existence passing into static condition...Therefore negative subsistence cannot be at all; it never has existed, it never does exist, it never will exist. But negative existence bears hidden in itself, positive life; for in the limitless depths of the abyss of its negativity lies hidden the power of standing forth from itself...between two ideas so different as those of negative and positive existence a certain nexus, or connecting-link, is required, and hence we arrive at the form which is called potential existence, which

while more nearly approaching positive existence, will scarcely admit of clear definition. It is existence in its possible form. For example, in a seed, the tree which may spring from it is hidden; it is in a condition of potential existence; is there; but it will not admit of definition...But, on the other hand, positive existence is always capable of definition; it is dynamic; it has certain evident powers, and it is therefore the antithesis of negative existence, and still more so of negative subsistence. It is the tree, no longer hidden in the seed, but developed into the outer. But positive existence has a beginning and an end, and it therefore requires another form from which to depend, for without this other concealed negative ideal behind it, it is unstable and unsatisfactory, McGregor Mathers (1991) pages 16-19.

The Kabbalah is heretical as far as orthodox Judaism is concerned because humanity, according to the initiate, seeks the divine essence within himself or herself by discovering nothingness, a sign of God's nearness. Halevi explains that God is AYIN, or Absolute Nothingness, and therefore the identity God is God, is, to use Hegelian language, an empty identity. But AYIN is opposed to AYIN SOF, or the One, as the number zero is opposed to the number one. The reason for the creation of the universe is that God was dissatisfied with this empty identity and bare opposition: "Face did not gaze on face...God wished to behold God", page 5. At the end of time when all obstacles are overcome, God and His creation will come together again in a higher identity. As the *Zohar* explains: "Man contains all that is in heaven above and on earth below, both heavenly and earthly creatures...The identification of passion and desire is accomplished. The soul of the just man transforms the dry place; love and passion are awakened above, and all is Unity", quoted in Nataf (1994) pages 21 and 24.

The universe came into being through ten stages which correspond to God's attributes, or Sefirot. The ten Sefirot are related to each other by a Tree of Life consisting of a triad of Will, Mercy and Rigour; in which Will holds the balance, Mercy expands and Rigour constrains life. This triad links to a series of other triads and dualities in a multi-dimensional interpenetrating whole, which is, through its complements and oppositions, expansions and contractions, in a constant state of becoming. Each stage reached in the Sefirah contains within it all the experience and knowledge of the previous stages of creation. Halevi explains that "Four Worlds interpenetrate the whole of existence. Schematically they may be seen as a 'Jacob's Ladder', with the Tree of one World growing out the structure of the last...no picture of existence shall become a fixed image that might be considered the ultimate. Alas, orthodoxy

has never understood this principle and often takes authority from redundant formulations”, page 11.

Halevi uses a couple of dialectical quotes from the *Zohar* to demonstrate further:

When the Holy One who created the Universe wished to reveal its hidden aspect, the light within darkness, He showed how things were intermingled. Thus out of darkness comes light and the concealed comes the revealed. In the same manner does good emerge from evil and Mercy from Justice, since they too are intertwined...An individual does not know that he is called for assessment before entering this World as well as after leaving it. He does not know how many transformations and esoteric trials he has to pass through, pages 28 and 29.

Concluding remarks

It is clear that by the end of the medieval period dialectical thought had become highly sophisticated, especially amongst alchemists and mystics. However, these thinkers continued to be preoccupied with mere sublimations of their respective societies' struggles. They expressed these struggles in the form of religious or natural metaphors, and failed to apply the dialectic itself to society. In the next chapter we see how the decline of feudal society in Europe, and the slow genesis of capitalism, led to the direct application of dialectics to specifically social themes.

Chapter Five

The Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Beginnings of Capitalism

Scholastic methods of supporting religious truth with rational arguments were progressively losing credibility and efficacy, and although the masters of the mediaeval schools never stopped exercising their semantic and logical skills, they were soon to be regarded as uninteresting remnants of a past age, incapable of competing with, let alone of matching, new intellectual trends either of the empiricist or the rationalist kind, all of them contributing to the merciless corrosion of faith, Kolakowski (1982), page 127.

The Florentine Renaissance

This combination of commerce, culture and enlightened despotism made Florence the Renaissance equivalent of Athens in classical antiquity, Curry and Zarate (1995), page 7.

And it happened in Florence...(where) Platonic learning was recalled from darkness into light, Ficino, quoted in Copenhaver and Schmitt (1992) page 163.

The tension between past and future imparts to the Renaissance, more than to any other period, a peculiar Janus-like quality. Like the two-headed god himself, it stands at the same time for the divide, the boundary and the gate. The only clarity that it can attain is thus poetic and artistic. As it looks backward, its aspect is that of humanism, passionately absorbed in the prototypes set by the past; as it gazes ahead, it projects a Faustian vision of undefined but unlimited power, the new anthropological myth of Man the Explorer, bent on an endless quest, de Santillana (1956) page 21.

The 14th to the 16th centuries, in which there was said to be a rebirth of ancient Greek knowledge and culture, largely from Byzantine sources, and a revival of some aspects of Roman civilisation, came to be known as the Renaissance. The social changes which coincided with these intellectual developments were centred around the rise of a burgher civilisation, i.e. a European merchant and banking class, which took political power away from the knights and aristocrats, who were often either reduced to the role of hangers-on at new 'princely'

courts or joined the professions. The practical needs of the new ruling class led to developments in mathematics, astrology/astronomy, physics, alchemy/chemistry, and geography, so that industry, and ever more distant trade and colonisation, could develop. The spread of printing revolutionised industry and scholarship in the 15th century. At first these developments only affected the walled cities and towns, which had grown out of the burgher communes, whereas the country-side was hardly affected. Eventually, as war began to affect their lives, more and more peasants revolted against their lords or 'princes', whilst their priests attacked the wealth and corruption of the papacy.

Renaissance Florence was one of a number of independent city states in what was later to become Italy. In the 13th century it had been involved in a brutal war between the armies of the Pope and those of the Holy Roman Empire. However, the factions on either side were constantly at war with each other, so that in the next century civil war broke out. In periods of relative stability Florence's mass of artisans, labourers and urban poor were ruled by a large elected council, and a number of smaller councils. Its wealthy merchant class traded far and wide in commodities including wool and silk; and its most famous banking family, the Medicis, became the Papal bankers, ruling the city with Papal support from 1434 to 1737.

During the late 15th century Medici rule was interrupted by those most intense contradictions war and revolt during an 18 year period of alternate republicanism, French invasion, religious demagoguery and riots by the disenfranchised masses. The Medicis routinely rigged the councils and snuffed out any real democracy, whilst they played their full part in the war and intrigue which continued throughout Renaissance Italy, as merchant 'princes', the Papacy and local aristocrats vied for power. Niccolo Machiavelli (1961) was the first in a line of thinkers, including Hobbes, Mandeville and Rousseau, who wrote openly and honestly about the deep contradictions of their societies. Machiavelli, like Mandeville, was reviled by those offended by his frankness, and *The Prince* was said to have been written by someone both depraved and inspired by the devil. In speaking about that most contradictory aspect of human life, the brutal warfare that marked his life and times, Machiavelli says:

So it should be noted that when he seizes a state the new ruler ought to determine all the injuries that he will need to inflict. He should inflict them once for all, and not have to renew them every day, and in that way he will be able to set men's minds at rest and win them over to him when he confers benefits. Whoever acts otherwise, either through timidity or bad

advice, is always forced to have the knife ready in his hand and he can never depend on his subjects because they, suffering fresh and continuous violence, can never feel secure with regard to him, Machiavelli (1961) page 66.

It is useful to note that Machiavelli anticipates an Hegelian theme, which was to prove helpful in the development of the idea of abstraction as a means of explaining the existence of ideology: the many-sided nature of reality. He says of critics of the present that “it is impossible that things should look the same to them seeing that they have other appetites, other interests, other standpoints”, quoted in Larrain page 18. We shall return to this important dialectical theme in later chapters.

As enlightened despots, the Medicis gave generously to the arts and humanities. During the 15th century Florence was acknowledged as the centre of European artistic and scientific creativity, with Alberti, Botticelli, da Vinci, Michelangelo and others working there. Most Renaissance scholars, typical of whom are Kristeller (1972) and de Santillana (1956), take a largely ahistorical and asocial perspective in their discussion of the thought of the period. In order to understand the thinkers of this period in more depth, it is necessary to ground their work socially. We can link, for example, Renaissance humanism, which stresses the value of the individual, with the freedom and individualism associated with the Florentine merchants and bankers. Humanist philosophy and classical republicanism became important themes in Florentine thought, and the education of the wealthy ruling class, including the humanities, embraced these ideals, although a minority opposed them. The more rebellious intellectuals felt stultified in the declining universities, they preferred subversive works, such as the social satires of the ancient Roman Lucian. An important dialectical source for humanism was the revival of the ancient thought contained in Hermetic and other esoteric texts. Such texts bolstered the idea of an immortal humanity as a microcosm of the relationship between heaven and earth. It supported an optimistic individualism, which contrasted sharply with medieval pessimism in which humanity as a whole was a hopeless victim of the fall, relying only on the grace of God for salvation. As Kristeller notes, even the Christian Aristotelians, such as Pomponazzi, were affected by the new intellectual climate and engaged in speculation concerning a residual or secular immortality “that does not depend on an infinite extension in time, but is fully realised in the actual experience of the present moment...(which) anticipates Spinoza and, perhaps, Hegel”, page 41.

Marsilio Ficino

because his publishing career corresponded with the ...new print technology, (Ficino) was the first major European philosopher whose works could spread widely and swiftly in his own lifetime, Copenhaver and Schmitt page 163.

Ficino, born near Florence in 1433 the son of doctor, was the finest product of that city's humanist education. His brand of neo-Platonist dialectics was inevitably mediated by the socio-economic conditions of the time. Renaissance Florence was a city state in which the rule of the merchant bankers was to varying degrees guaranteed by the Papacy. Ficino, as an ordained priest, had to tread a careful path embracing the needs of both these groups, as well as those of the various sections of the middle classes, to which he belonged. His Platonism, with its strict hierarchy of being and advocacy of a quiet life of contemplation, suited the religious authorities. However, in order to legitimate the activities of the merchants and bankers, like Plotinus and the Kabbalists before him, he had to interpret such activities as the fitting end of an active life, a link between heaven and earth. Various vested interests disapproved of Plato's magic, his homosexuality and his "paganism", whilst his anti-trade polemics did not endear him to the Florentine merchants. Therefore Ficino's neo-Platonism, was a synthesis of a number of the master's ideas and those of other thinkers. His philosophy was built round the "pagan" dialectics of Plotinus, with his oppositions such as the One and the many, being and non-being and macrocosm and microcosm, as contained in the *Enneads*, translated and interpreted by Ficino.

In *Five Questions Concerning the Mind* Ficino anticipates Hegel by alluding to the companion of Minerva, saying that "In this common order of the whole, all things, no matter how diverse, are brought back to unity according to a single determined harmony and rational plan...the common end of the whole to which the single ends are led must also be prescribed by that mind", quoted in Cassirer et al (1948), page 195. He also anticipates Marx by pointing out that workmen must possess the architect's plan or "by no means will they be moved to their prescribed occupations by anyone who does not first possess the common prescribed end of the whole work", page 198. On vantage points he says that it is necessary to see "the form of the whole itself, and which, from any point, beholds the limits of the whole, and the

gradations through which it extends”, page 200. Ficino’s ultimate loyalty was to the vantage point of the humanist merchant class, he was often at odds with the Church. He insisted on the important role of the disparate members of the middle classes: “Ficino believed that Platonic texts contained mysteries of Christian doctrine that could be comprehended and communicated only by special interpreters - lovers, poets, priests, and prophets - rapt in an ecstasy that unites them with God”, Copenhaver page 154.

Kristeller discusses Ficino’s dialectical humanism:

if I am not mistaken, he reconstructs the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being in such a way that the rational soul which stands for man comes to occupy the place in the center, below God and the angels and above qualities and bodies. Moreover, Ficino insists on the universality of the human mind and sees in this its basic affinity with God. The soul tends to know all truth and to attain all goodness; it tries to become all things and is capable of living the life of all beings higher and lower. In this way the soul tries to become God, and this is its divinity...man is to dominate all elements and all animals, and thus is the born lord and ruler of nature, and man the astronomer...is virtually endowed with a mind similar to that of God who constructed the spheres themselves, pages 10-11.

The late medieval period had left a philosophical dualism, or *double truth theory*, separating faith and reason, most notably in the work of Ockham, Pomponazzi and the Latin followers of Ibn Rush’d. This was part of an arid Christian Aristotelianism, which rejected the use of mathematics and experiments in science. The double truth was a view which sublimated the dual power between the Church and the merchants/bankers. Ficino was the leading member of the Florentine Academy, a centre set up by the Medicis for the revival of Platonic philosophy, and he attempted to overcome the dualism by reuniting faith and reason as different expressions of the same truth. In this intellectual endeavour he was saying that philosophy and theology were of equal status, hence the title of his main work: *Platonic Theology*. When speaking of theology, he meant not only Christianity but a synthesis of this with Judaism, Egyptian and Chaldean theology, philosophy, magic, Zoroastrianism, and other doctrines. For Ficino the history of philosophy was to be thought of “not just as a linear transmission of ideas but also as a recurring struggle in which wisdom or faith, philosophy or theology, reason or eloquence might rise or fall as lights of the human spirit”, Copenhaver and Schmitt page 148.

statements and that the presence of these true statements makes the philosopher worth studying, Kristeller page 59.

Pico, the younger friend of Ficino, spent some of his short life studying in Padua and Paris, later learning Arabic, Hebrew and Aramiac. He went further than Ficino in his humanist synthesis of Christianity and other systems, including a revived Aristotelianism, neo-Platonism, Averroism, Kabbalist dialectics and Hermeticism. Pico went so far in this direction as to be referred to as a “neo-pagan” in his attempt to overcome the crushing orthodoxy of the Aristotelian-Christians. He called the supporters of late medieval orthodoxy “dull, rude, uncultured barbarians”, taunting them with statements like: “There is no science that gives us more certainty of Christ’s divinity than magic and the Kabbalah”, quoted in Copenhaver page 169. However, it is important to note that Pico attacked the determinism of predictive astrology. His brave defence of humanism against Catholicism is an example to contemporary humanists, who face the attacks of structuralists and postmodernists with their philosophy of hyperreal dehumanised images, seemingly all pervasive and blind forces of contemporary global capitalism, which they believe have crushed individual initiative and creativity, or the “death of the subject”. Pico reveals his open critical approach when he says: “I have ranged through all the masters of philosophy, investigated all books, and come to know all schools...There has been nobody in the past, and there will be nobody after us, to whom truth has given itself to be understood in its entirety. Its immensity is too great for human capacity to be equal to it”, quoted on page 58 of Kristeller.

Not surprisingly Pico’s *Oration* of 1486, a prelude to the planned *Conclusiones*, was condemned by Pope Innocent VIII, and he had to flee, only to be arrested later. According to Kristeller, his thought included the view that humanity, as the microcosm, had the potential to *become a plant, an animal, a celestial being, an angel, or he may even be united with God Himself...I should like to go even further and suggest that it was Pico’s passionate concern with freedom...which made the notion of a fixed though central position of man unacceptable to him and compelled him to place man outside the hierarchy. This is a rather bold view, and it may be considered as one of the first steps in dissolving the notion of the great chain of being that had dominated Western thought for so many centuries...Man’s excellence is realized only when he chooses the higher forms of moral and intellectual life that are open to*

him, and this excellence belongs to his given nature only in so far as this nature includes among its potentialities those higher forms of life, pages 12-14.

Pico (1998) contains a translation of the famous *On the Dignity of Man*, in which he develops the theme of human potentiality: “At man’s birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into brute. If rational, he will come out a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God. And if he is not contented with the lot of any creature but takes himself up into the center of his own unity, then, made one spirit with God and settled in the solitary darkness of the Father, who is above all things, he will stand ahead of all things. Who does not wonder at this chameleon which we are?”, page 5. Such ideas on potentiality which, in opposition to Aristotle, include freedom and the power to reason, are important dialectical ideas which were to influence Bruno. Similarly the idea that “the opposed views of different philosophical schools may be reconciled and that there is some truth in the teachings of all major philosophers and theologians”, quoted in Kristeller page 15, anticipates Hegel by 300 years. Pico’s view that “man combines and unites all things, not only through his thought, but also in reality”, page 16, is reminiscent of Marx.

He speaks of the role of dialectic: “by shaking off the mist of reason by means of dialectic, as if washing off the filth of ignorance and vice, let us purge the soul, that the affections may not audaciously run riot, nor an imprudent reason sometime rave...philosophizing along the rungs of the ladder of nature, and penetrating through everything from center to center, we shall at one time be descending, tearing apart, like Osiris, the one into many by a titanic force; and we shall at another time be ascending and gathering into one the many...Dialectic will calm the turmoils of a reason shoved about between the fist fights of oratory and the deceits of the syllogism...Natural philosophy will bring calm in such a way as to command us to remember that, according to Heraclitus, our nature is born of war”, Pico (1998), pages 9-11.

The dialectic of Lorenzo Valla

No man is a stone; some man is an animal; therefore, some animal is not a stone. I can hardly keep myself from screaming. O you family of Peripatetics, in love with trifles! Have

you ever heard anyone arguing like this, you nation of madmen?”, Valla, rejecting the trivia of Aristotelian logic, quoted in Copenhaver pages 226-7.

Do I say that free will is annulled by the will of God?...How is God good if He takes away free will?, Valla, in Cassirer et al (1948) pages 174 and 177.

Does not Paul say that from the same lump of clay one vessel was made unto honor and the other indeed unto dishonor? Nor ought it to be said that vessels of honor were made of polluted matter, Valla, page 178.

Lorenzo Valla (1405-1457) is another important humanist thinker, and Papal critic, whose *Dialogue on Free Will* is a Platonic-style dialectic on the subject of determinism and free will. He takes up knotty problems, subjecting them to many-sided investigation: “I said it was necessary for Judas to betray, unless we entirely annul providence, because God foresaw it would be thus. So if it was possible for something to happen otherwise than it was foreseen, providence is destroyed, but if it is impossible, free will is destroyed, a thing no less unworthy to God than if we should cancel His providence. I, in what concerns me, would prefer Him to be less wise rather than less good. The latter would injure mankind; the other would not...know that it is not to be conceded that whatever is possible will likewise happen. It is possible for you to do otherwise than God foreknows, nevertheless you will not do otherwise, nor will you therefore deceive Him”, Cassirer et al (1948), pages 168-9.

A number of Renaissance natural philosophers, most notably Galileo, wrote treatises on Aristotelian logic, the most important being by Valla. His *Dialectical Disputations* argued for dialectic to become overtly rhetorical, more suited to verbal demonstrations of the solutions to ethical, religious or political problems. Exposing the futility of the attempt to construct a formal logical language, an enterprise still engaging contemporary logicians, Valla noted that different languages, such as Latin, Greek or a vernacular language, required different rules of logic because different languages relate to different cultures, or ways of life. Such ideas marked Valla as the most astute of a number of humanists who rejected attempts to construct the formal languages used to demonstrate logical validity in the universities. These languages were based on Peter of Spain’s codification of Aristotle, which humanists like Valla saw as “barbaric, inelegant, hypertechnical, and ultimately devoid of any truly human purpose”,

Copenhaver page 29. Valla informs us about both logic and Renaissance gender relations when he says: “foolish women sometimes know the meaning of words better than great philosophers. Women put words to use; philosophers play with them”, quoted in Copenhaver page 219. In rejecting alphabetical and other forms of symbolic notation, and the *a priori* identification of certain logical fallacies, Valla showed that his thought was in advance of not only Renaissance, but also contemporary, formal logicians.

Renaissance developments in dialectic, rhetoric and the critique of logic

Using the example of late Renaissance natural philosophy, specifically astronomy, Moss (1993) attempts to identify the attitudes of important philosophers of the period to logic, dialectic and rhetoric. Logic was understood as demonstrative syllogistic reasoning, capable of attaining *certainty*. In contrast, dialectic was defined as argument which, because no certain premises were agreed, could yield only *probable* conclusions. Rhetoric attempted to induce assent using both methods, with the addition of induction, but in a less formal way. Typically rhetoric used vivid examples, and made use of “*ethos*, the character of the speaker, and *pathos*, the emotions of the audience” Moss page 11. In practice, despite Moss’s distinctions, the interchangeability of the terms rhetoric, logic and dialectic, established in the medieval period, continued during the Renaissance. Humanists began to use the term *dialectic* to cover both dialectic and logic, axioms often being expressed in the form of a rhetorical question.

Moss treats the thought of the period as a mere interplay of ideas, detached from their socio-economic context. The new merchants, soon to be colonialists, needed theory which brought reliable practical results, so where no immediate practical applications were available, theories remained speculative and all the techniques available to the philosopher were brought into play. *Routine* experiment, which began with Newton, was either unavailable, as in astronomy, simply not used, or performed in secret, especially where alchemy or natural magic was involved. Copernicus, argues Moss failing to acknowledge the quote’s Hermetic allusion, typically used much rhetoric when arguing for a heliocentric universe:

At rest, however, in the middle of everything is the sun. For in this most beautiful temple, who would place this lamp in another or better position than that from which it can light up the whole thing at the same time? For, the sun is not inappropriately called by some people the lantern of the universe, its mind by others, and its ruled by others. (Hermes) the Thrice

Greatest labels it a visible god, and Sophocles' Electra, the all seeing. Thus indeed, as though seated on a royal throne, the sun governs the family of planets revolving around it, from the De revolutionibus, quoted in Moss page 1.

Quoting the views of the 20th century writer Marcello Pera on scientific logic, Moss appears to accept that even today, despite its reified positivism, rhetoric is crucial to natural science: *to be rational is to accept those theories, to work out those problems, to take those decisions that are supported by good reasons, 'good' in the sense that they won a victory in a concrete debate conducted according to a concrete configuration of the basis of scientific dialectics...scientific rhetoric (is) the set of those persuasive, argumentative techniques scientists use in order to reach their conclusions, quoted in Moss page 22 (my emphasis).*

In his *Remarks on Aristotle* Ramus developed a simplified system of logic for students, based mainly on the Platonic dialectical method of division. This method was at odds with the overly elaborate Aristotelian system based on the syllogism, associated with Papal orthodoxy. Protestantism warmed to the new approach, which spread around Europe through the medium of the printed textbook. Eventually Aristotelians took the sting out of the approach, synthesising the chart based methods of Ramus into their own texts. Similarly Luther, says de Santillana (1956), *considered himself an Ockhamist of sorts, or 'terminist', as the name was, 'for it provides good means for calling a spade a spade', but in his Table Talk he rues the time spent 'on philosophy all that devil's muck, when I could have been busy with poetry and legend and so many good things', page 17.*

Nicholas of Cusa and the 'science of the infinite'

In his metaphysics each particular being is nothing but a particular manifestation or contraction of the one infinite and divine principle, and, in the same way, each human doctrine is but a special expression of the universal truth that can never be expressed in one particular statement. On this basis, it is possible for Cusamus to find a partial truth in a variety of philosophical and religious doctrines, including Mohammedanism, Kristeller pages 53-4.

The Truth is simple, it speaks aloud in the market place, Cusa, quoted in de Santillana page 48.

Though we neither perceive it nor understand it, we know for a fact that all things stand in some sort of relation to one another; that, in virtue of this inter-relation, all the individuals constitute one universe and that in the one Absolute the multiplicity of being is unity itself. Every image is an approximate reproduction of the exemplar, Cusa, quoted in de Santillana page 59.

Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) signals the beginning of both German Renaissance thought and German idealist philosophy. Visits to Basle and Constantinople made him aware of the humanist movement, whilst his early studies at Padua alerted him to the social changes taking place in the Italian cities due to tension between the new 'princes' and republican movements, mediated by the growth of trade and industry. Cusa became an ordained priest, and later bishop and cardinal. He was initially a strong advocate of reform in Papal politics, supporting the conciliar movement. When the Church triumphed over the various heterodox tendencies, he switched sides and supported Papal authority. However, until his death there remained an ambivalence about Cusa's views, detectable, in a sublimated form, in his dialectics. For example, Cusa was affected by the Muslim capture of Constantinople in 1453, fearing that it presaged the end of the Christian faith, he responded in one of his last books, which outraged his orthodox contemporaries, by calling for a synthesis of all religious doctrines into one new totalising faith, a call which had been made 250 years earlier by the Sufi Ibn 'Arabi.

On Learned Ignorance, title of Cusa's most famous work, is a chiasmus he counterposed to the Ignorant Learnedness of the Aristotelians. The work makes clear Cusa's interest in mathematics and numerology, including Pythagorean symbolism of number and geometrical form. Meister Eckhart's mysticism and the dialectical religious language of Pseudo-Dionysius were also major influences on Cusa; using them as the basis for what he called his *negative theology*, which rejected both Aristotelian reasoning and the static language typical of late medieval religious debates. In *On Learned Ignorance* Cusa says of negative theology: "negative propositions are true and affirmative ones inadequate; and that of the negative ones those are truer which eliminate greater imperfections from the infinitely Perfect. It is truer, for example, to deny that God is a stone than to deny that He is life or intelligence...In affirmative propositions the contrary holds good; It is truer to assert that He is intelligence and life than to assert that He is earth, stone or anything material", quoted in de Santillana page 62. On the following page de Santillana quotes from Cusa's richly dialectical work: "there is not a being in the universe which is not a unity composed of potency, act and the

movement connecting them, and that none of these three is capable of absolute subsistence without the others”.

Central to Cusa's dialectical method was the synthesis of a combination of silences, symbols, metaphors and contradictions taken from mathematics, proto-physics, mysticism and esotericism. Mathematical figures and ideas were very important in the thought of the period; the poet Donne used a mathematical analogy which was to be developed in later dialectical thought: “Thy firmness draws my circle just, And makes me end, where I begun”, quoted in de Santillana page 25. The central mathematical term used by Cusa was the *infinite*, known to us in its various modern mathematical meanings, but its romantic poetic uses had been developed by Ficino. He called it “the chain that links the world together”, whilst Pascal was to write that “the silence of infinite space frightens me”, de Santillana page 14. Cusa’s cosmology, according to de Santillana, anticipates Einstein’s general relativity theory, “since there is no absolute space or frame of reference, and motion and rest depend from the point of observation: the condition being that the cosmos must be symmetrical to all of its parts, i.e. at each point it must appear as if this were the centre...motion is everywhere ; the only real ‘rest’ would be infinite velocity, since maximum and minimum coincide”, page 53. Whilst de Santillana this is too speculative and abstract to be of any practical value, Lindsay, in his Introduction to Bruno (1962), disagrees, noting that Cusa engaged in some important scientific work. Cusa’s pioneering mode of thought, coupled with the practice of alchemy and the non-determinist aspects of astrology, led to considerable progress in the work of later scientists, including Kepler and Newton.

For Cusa infinity was not about the “more or less”, but expressed the ineffable incomprehensible idea of God, compared to which all other forms of being are lower, since they are to varying degrees separated from the infinite: “Now it is between God and Nothingness that we have to think that all creatures take their place. The upper world as you see it is not without darkness...In the lower world darkness reigns, yet light is not absent” Cusa, employing the Gnostic interpenetration of opposites, quoted by de Santillana page 54. However, humanity, described by Cusa as like “owls trying to look at the sun” page 55, is exceptional because of its ability to conjecture: “man is a microcosm...Man can be a human God, then, and as God in a human manner he can be a human angel, a human beast...or whatever else. Within man’s potency all things exist in their way”, quoted in Copenhaver page 181. Cusa uses the term "science of the infinite" to describe his dialectical mode of thought, though claiming this is ultimately inadequate to the task of describing the infinite.

However, existence is marked by paradox, since the infinite is constantly opposed by the finite in a relationship which Cusa calls the "coincidence of opposites", a term used to distinguish him from the empty "being" of the "Aristotelian sect". The infinite is the point, he says, where all potentialities become actual, circles are straight lines and spheres are "generated by the rotation of the circle", de Santillana page 51. As in his version of the ancient theory of the microcosm, all finite things contain infinity within them, it is their very being. Whilst accepting Platonic dialectics of the One and the many, he rejected the theory of the forms, preferring his numerical and geometrical analogies to articulate the relation between the infinite and the finite, God and things. Cusa speaks in similar fashion about the relationship between the maximum and the minimum, between learning and ignorance.

Cusa is similarly dialectical in his discussion of the unattainability of absolute truth: "Therefore the quiddity of things, which is ontological truth, is unattainable in its entirety; and though it has been the objective of all philosophers, by none has it been found as it really is. The more profoundly we learn this lesson of ignorance, the closer we draw to truth itself", quoted in de Santillana page 57. Rejecting the idea of absolute knowledge, he insists on the uniqueness of things and thereby rejects the notion of absolute identity, for as every joiner knows no two pieces of wood can ever be exactly the same size: "No matter, then, how equal the measure and the thing measured are, they will remain for ever different", page 57. An example of his identification of real contradiction is: "the top that boys play with...The stronger the boy's arm, the quicker the top spins, so that it seems to stand and rest while it moves the more", quoted on page 183 of Copenhaver. Speaking of Cusa's view of perception, de Santillana says: "Thus the conquest of the sensible consists in weaving far out beyond it a net of abstract relations which gradually enclose it and tend to a limit", page 52.

Barrett, in Martin (1992), presents the reaction of analytical philosophy to Cusa's dialectical "synthesis of opposites". The simultaneous existence of opposites is "incomprehensible" and "inexpressible" says Barret, revealing his preference for the law of non-contradiction and fixed symbols of formal logic. Quoting Wittgenstein's famous remark: "About that of which we cannot speak we must be silent", on page 63, Barrett seems unaware that this sentiment accords with Cusa's own views. Barrett displays the 'common sense' of analytical philosophy:

Of the speculative mystics with whom we are dealing here, the one that went closest to the edge, if not over it, was Nicholas of Cusa...He believed...that...features that are as opposed as black is

from white, good and evil, truth from falsehood, in some miraculous and mystical way come together and become reconciled genuinely - not in some fudged manner as black and white can become grey, or good and bad can become moderate behaviour, or truth and falsity are presented as possibilities or probabilities. Whether these would be the opposites reconciled in God or what the opposites are we are not told. What we are told is that in the case of any feature God is both the maximum and the minimum, the greatest and the least. This is a real stinker...It may be harsh to say that in talking about God we do not know what we are talking about (or not much), that we are trying to express the inexpressible and are banging our heads against the boundaries of what can be said. But is that not preferable to thinking we know what we are talking about when we do not?, pages 62 and 69.

Barrett's annoyance at Cusa's paradoxes results in part from his refusal to consider the existence of real contradictions, thus preventing him from realising that Cusa is adopting a religious or mystical solution, the only 'solution' available, to the real social problems, or "synthesis of opposites" of mid 15th century Europe.

Paracelsus

To learn and to do nothing is little. To learn and to do is great and whole, Paracelsus (1988), page 105.

But just as the cosmos dissolves into a thousand contradictions when we focus our attention on its individual manifestations, so a great personality will break down into seemingly irreconcilable and irreducible contradictions as soon as one attempts to define it by successively describing its different facets...Paracelsus unites all the antinomies of a paganizing mysticism of nature and a pious Christian faith, Jolande Jacobi in the preface to Paracelsus (1988), page xxv-xxvi.

The 16th century writer and medic Paracelsus, son of an impoverished noble father and a bondswoman mother, was initiated into the mysteries of alchemy, and learned natural and medical science at a number of universities. Paracelsus' approach to medicine was revolutionary, he was called the Luther of the physicians, and totalising: "in the great integrated totality in which all created things are interrelated, nothing has a life that is

absolutely its own: man, the earth, and the cosmos are only meaningful parts of an organic whole, which down to its last particles is ruled by God and His order. Treatment of the plague, of wounds, of syphilis, gout, epilepsy, or any other disease, is a 'mission', and so is the preparation of herb juices, the smelting of metals, or the analysis of mineral water; for god has created all of these to serve man, the highest of creatures, the beloved by God. But they can serve him only if he works toward his aim in the right way, this is, in a way pleasing to God", Jacobi in Paracelsus (1988), pages xlv-xlvi.

Paracelsus' metaphysic is based on the four elements which contain "all the forces and faculties of perishable things. In them there are day and night, warmth and coldness, stone and fruit, and everything else, still unformed. In a piece of wood... there lie concealed the forms of animals, the forms of plants of every description, the forms of all instruments; and he who can carve them out finds them... The *limbus* is the primordial stuff of man ... He who knows the nature of the *limbus* knows also what man is... Now, the *limbus* is heaven and earth, the upper and lower sphere of the cosmos, the four elements, and everything they comprise; therefore it is just to identify it with the microcosm, for it too is the whole world", Paracelsus (1988), pages 14-17. Humanist anthropocentrism predominates when Paracelsus says "The body attracts heaven... and this takes place in accordance with the great divine order... In (man) there lies the 'young heaven', that is to say, all the planets are part of man's structure and they are the children of the 'great heaven' which is their father. For man was created from heaven and earth, and is therefore like them!... he can be understood only as an image of the macrocosm, of the Great Creature. Only then does it become manifest what is in him. For what is outside is also inside; and what is not outside man is not inside. The outer and the inner are *one* thing, *one* constellation, *one* influence, *one* concordance, *one* duration... *one* fruit", page 21.

Paracelsus was attracted to the ideology of peasants and gypsies, having to leave Salzburg because of his support for the masses in the Peasant War. He rejected the academic orthodoxy of his day, quitting a teaching post at Basel University after a warrant for his arrest was issued. The marginalised Paracelsus became a Faustian figure: "badly dressed, frequently drunk, and always ready to quarrel...(he refused) to worship at the shrine of Galen, Avicenna and Aristotle, whose writings were accorded the authority of Scriptures by the medical practitioners of the day. He even burnt some of the sacred volumes in public and insulted the

unquestioning physicians of his time in almost everything he wrote, calling them ‘sausage-stuffers’, ‘clownish concocters’, ‘imposters’ and ‘ignorant sprouts’”, Gilchrist page 101-2.

It was in political theory and economics, however, that Paracelsus made small but significant contribution to our study. Revealing his egalitarianism and his understanding of the dialectic of potentiality and actuality he said “you should not judge people according to their stature, but honour them all equally. What is in you is in all. Each has what you also have within you; and the poor grows the same plants in his garden as the rich. In man, the ability to practise all crafts and arts is innate, but not all these arts have been brought to the light of day... The child is still an uncertain being, and he receives his form according to the potentialities that you awaken in him. If you awaken his ability to make shoes, he will be a shoemaker; if you awaken the stonecutter in him, he will be a stonecutter; and if you summon forth the scholar in him, he will be a scholar. And this can be so because all potentialities are inherent in him; what you awaken in him comes forth from him; the rest remains unawakened, absorbed in sleep. We are born to be awake, not to be asleep!”, page 105. He adds: it is “more blessed to speak of miners under the earth than of tournaments and chivalry. For in the former the spirit deals in divine works, while in the latter it is busied in worldly things, to please the world in vanity and purity”, page 109. An anthropocentric approach to nature is apparent in the following: “It is God’s will that nothing remain unknown to man as he walks in the light of nature; for all things belonging to nature exist for the sake of man. And since they have been created for his sake, and since it is he who needs them, he must explore everything that lies in nature”, page 109.

Paracelsus introduces an early version of the labour theory of value when he notes that in order to be used or enjoyed raw materials man “must expend labour upon them... Let us not be idlers or dreamers, but always at work, both physically and spiritually, so that no part of us remains inactive. Such work in the sweat of our brow may even drive away the devil and his pack, for where man is at work none of them can abide”, page 111.

Giordano Bruno

*Hence it is that liberty, will, necessity, are identical; and further, action is identical with will-power and being, Bruno in *Of the Infinite, the Universe and the Worlds*, quoted in de Santillana (1956), page 266.*

..religion is needed for restraining rude populations, Bruno, quoted in de Santillana page 248.

Burchio: Oh, why not turn the world upside down and have done with it!

Fracastoro: with a world downside up as it stands, that would not be such a bad idea.

.....

Cicada: Yes, it is well said that the kingdom of God is within us and that divinity dwells within our souls through virtue of the regenerate intellect and will.

Bruno revealing his understanding of inversion, which was to become an important metaphor for Marx, quoted on pages 267 and 272 of de Santillana.

*Let those who contribute to progress be honoured and rewarded, and let those do no work, and the misers enslaved to property, be despised and held as beings of no value whatever, Bruno, echoing the views of Paracelsus, in *The Expulsion*, Bruno (1962), page 8.*

Bruno, the first truly *Italian* philosopher, was born near Naples in 1548, reluctantly becoming a Dominican friar and later a priest. Learning “logic and dialectic”, he later obtained a doctorate in theology. As is well known, Bruno was burned at the stake for the crime of heresy in 1600 and, as is clear from his writings, led a tortured life due to his inability to obtain the intellectual freedom he craved. Bruno’s dialogues, with their display of wide learning, are a religious sublimation of his rejection, frustration and anger. His attacks on the Papacy, including its more enlightened wings, forced him to leave Italy, discard his religious clothes and teach in France. The stridency of his views meant that, like Paracelsus, Bruno had to keep on the move around Europe, leading to his ironic self description as “Academician of no academy”, quoted in de Santillana page 244.

Although Bruno admired the Protestant critique of the landowning-Papal establishment, which “binds and deceives in countless ways” Bruno page 9, he was equally scathing in his views on Protestant theology. Like the other Renaissance dialecticians, Bruno’s thought was a synthesis, including what he knew of ancient Egyptian thought, the pre-Socratics, Cusa’s dialectics, natural magic, astrology, alchemy, numerology, Lucretian materialism and the Kabbalah. From these sources, he created a complex system based around a divine finite-infinite unity. Though he uses some of its metaphysical formulations, Bruno argues against the Aristotelian orthodoxy, or as he called it “the three-headed hellhound of Aristotle, Ptolemy and dogma” de Santillana page 245,

with its mechanist geo-centric cosmology and empty logic chopping. Bruno claimed that a unity, formed from an infinity of moving particles and animated by a universal soul, persisted whilst perishable particulars, with their ambiguities and contradictions, came and went. The following extracts from Bruno (1962) reveal the pre-Socratic monist aspect of his dialectical thought, which he refers to as “magic”. Although he uses dialectical formulations, unlike Mandeville and Rousseau, here they are not used in his *social* criticisms:

On this diversity and opposition depend order, symmetry, complexion, peace, concord, composition and life. So that the world is composed of contraries, of which some, such as earth and water, live and grow by help of their contraries, such as the fiery suns. This I think was the meaning of the sage who declared that God creates harmony out of the sublime contraries; and of that other who believed this whole universe to owe existence to the strife of the concordant and the love of the opposed, page 33. The beginning, middle, and end of the birth, growth, and perfection of whatever we behold is from contraries, by contraries, and to contraries; and wherever contrariety is, there is action and reaction, there is motion, diversity, multitude, and order, there are degrees, succession and vicissitude, page 34. Nature appears as a vast ocean. Its inner energy begets life as the waters of the sea take various shapes under the force that constrains them, page 35.

Although he soaked up the dialectical techniques of his predecessors, both Christian and Muslim, Bruno was particularly influenced by Cusa, who would “have equalled Pythagoras if his genius had not been stifled under priestly garments” Bruno (1962) page 9. Cusa, along with Copernicus, believed that infinity refers only to God, whereas Bruno, answering the questions of the Inquisition with courage, explained his pantheistic view that infinity also refers to a plurality of worlds within the universe, all of which were both dependent on and independent of God. Of great importance, since it anticipates Hegel and Marx, is Bruno’s simultaneous advocacy of observation, experiment and the inductive science, as methods of *analysis*, along with a method of *presentation*, which, typical of the later Italian Renaissance, is dialectical. As a bridge between these methods Bruno explains the limits of knowledge gained empirically, he says that the infinite:

cannot be the object of sense; and a person who asks to obtain an idea of it through the senses might as well expect to see substance and essence with his eyes. If he wished to deny it for the reason that it is not sensible, visible to the senses, he would be obliged to deny also his own substance and being, quoted in de Santillana page 261.

Bruno's threat to the Papacy concerned his monist, yet dialectical, view of nature, which at times he extended to society, particularly to the strife-torn population centres of Europe. His courage in expressing his views so openly led to some brutal treatment, including exile, imprisonment and finally execution. De Santillana cites Bruno's dialogue *Ash Wednesday*, which, unlike most other Renaissance thinkers who concealed their social criticisms in their natural philosophy, partially anticipates Mandeville by the use of comic description of typical members of the various social classes in London, a city he had visited. His satires reveal comic skills, allegorical techniques, knowledge of myth, courage, moral and political purpose and attacks the Pope and his retinue. In his Introduction to Bruno (1962) Lindsay, despite a tendency to discuss Bruno's rich synthesis from the perspective of the materialist-idealist straightjacket, notes that his social thought was revolutionary. Although scathing of the thieves and beggars of London, Bruno rejected the new colonialist adventures of the period because they enslaved native populations. In the *Expulsion* we read:

The usurpers are worse than grubs, caterpillars, or destroying locusts, and should be treated accordingly...No institution or law ought to be approved or accepted which does not tend to the highest end: the direction of our minds and reform of our natures so that they produce fruit necessary or useful for human intercourse, quoted in Bruno page 39.

Poetry inspired Bruno's often tormented philosophy, and de Santillana quotes the following dialectical extract from Bruno:

It is the One which wins my love; the One that gives me freedom in my bondage, peace in my torment, wealth in my poverty, life in my death, page 246.

Such verse can be compared with Marx's dialectical literary style, developed from the poetry written in his youth, where the chiasmus was a common device. An early example in the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx (1959), refers to the overwhelming power of money in capitalist society. Marx says:

It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence and intelligence into idiocy, page 141.

The Church's execution of Bruno, for his daring thought, acted as a brake on later thinkers, and although succeeding scientists and philosophers knew of his work, only Kepler openly

acknowledged his contribution. However, Lindsay claims that his dialectical method influenced scientists, including Bacon, and the philosopher Spinoza. Without doubt Bruno exerted considerable influence upon Schelling and Hegel, as will become clear in the next chapter.

Jacob Boehme

I know that without me God could not live a second - Turned if I were to nothing, He'd give up the ghost in despair, Angelus Silesius, often linked with Boehme, quoted in de Santillana page 194.

his thought foreshadow(s) the advent of all the logical systems of the new philosophy, Schelling speaking of Boehme, quoted in de Santillana page 209.

(Boehme) was persecuted all his life by the local Lutheran pastors with abuse which today would be unprintable, de Santillana page 209.

*a lute that lies still, and is indeed a dumb thing that is neither heard nor understood; but if it be played upon, then its form is understood, in what form and tune it stands, and according to what note it is set, from Boehme's *The Signature of All Things*, quoted in de Santillana page 219.*

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), self-educated cobbler and contemporary of Galileo, Kepler and Bacon, could not accept the Christian doctrine of "the fall". As a result of airing his views in an unpublished manuscript, the "mere cobbler", as his critics referred to him, Boehme was imprisoned, and released on the promise that he would write no more books. As one of a number of intellectuals with heterodox views in various parts of what is today Germany, Boehme continued to be persecuted, his grave even being desecrated. The "cobbler" could not accept that the God of the new Protestantism, having already established its own equivalent of Papal orthodoxy, could commit such a cruel act as to knowingly create a race where the masses were destined to be overwhelmed by suffering and evil, whilst the predestined few prospered. His speculations, and the influence of Copernicus and Paracelsus, led Boehme to seek divine wisdom, and drew the dialectical conclusion that "Nothing can reveal itself without resistance", quoted in de Santillana page 212, concluding that God was both good and evil, "God against God", all and nothing, the yes and the no which opposes it. As an alchemist Boehme formed his theology and natural philosophy from its vocabulary of moments and contradictions:

Boehme saw that the conflict induced between the warring elements in the alchemical vessel was an emblem of the activity of nature itself. Without conflict there could be no movement, no difference between created beings, and no motivation to bring about change and improvement, explains Gilchrist, page 90, failing to note social “conflicts”.

Boehme speaks of God being in constant movement, starting with the desire of dark Nothingness (Ungrund) striving towards Being, a process of *becoming* or development. De Santillana says this: “‘development’ has entered the philosophical language here for the first time, not in the old sense of ‘unwinding’ but in the new sense implied by our own idea of ‘evolution’. Difference, impulse and growth are expressed in the coming to the fore of different qualities”, page 213. He notes Boehme’s remark that “Quality is the mobility or impulse of a thing”, adding that: “Here, as in Bruno, the dynamic element of Renaissance thought has broken loose from the prison of formal systems and is moving towards new possibilities. Two laws have been suggested, if only as psychological experiences; the law of contrast, and the law of development as progressive unfolding of difference”, page 213. Boehme uses anthropocentric terms like anxiousness, hunger and attraction when he speaks of nature or “the nothing in the something”. He explains: “For in the nothing the will would not be manifest to itself, wherefore we know that the will seeks itself, and finds itself in itself, and its seeking is a desire, and its finding is the essence of the desire, wherein the will finds itself” quoted by de Santillana on page 221.

Waterfield, in his introduction to Boehme (1989), observes that his thought takes into account the notion of the *self*, in the context of self-realization and self-revelation, terms which became central to German idealist dialectics. Particularly influential on Hegel was the idea that there are seven successive stages, or Forms of Nature, in Boehme’s cosmology: Harshness, Attraction, Bitterness, Fire, Light, Sound and Figure, each of which enters into an opposition with the previous moment, from which arises a synthesis which resolves the opposition and in turn forms the next one.

Boehme is a religious mystic in the tradition of Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, replacing the mathematical vocabulary of the latter with the symbolism of alchemy. As a devout Lutheran, Boehme’s work is also influenced by Protestant individualism, with its emphasis on freedom and choice. He believes the individual, or consciousness, possesses the potential for good or evil, love or anger, rather like the fruit tree which “though it has blossoms they fall off; also frost and snow

and many a cold wind beat upon it before it comes to any growth and bearing of fruit”, from *The Confessions*, quoted in de Santillana page 218.

Boehme’s work was to prove influential on the thinking of the poets Milton and Blake, the philosophers Schopenhauer, Schelling and Hegel, and, it has occasionally been argued, the scientist Newton.

Renaissance and Enlightenment dialectics and scientific progress

Robert Fludd: *I behold the internal and essential impulses that issue from nature herself: he has hold of the tail, I grasp the head; I perceive the first cause, he its effects.*

Kepler: *I hold the tail, but I hold it in my hand; you may grasp the head mentally, though only I fear, in your dreams.*

Quoted in de Santillana pages 206-7.

Twentieth century positivists, and their Leninist cousins, have described Renaissance history as a period in which mechanistic atomistic science gradually triumphed over religious superstition and the “black arts” of alchemy, astrology and magic. Rebel thinkers of the period are presented as proto-atheists or materialists, on the Enlightenment path to “rational” thought and “the scientific method”. In fact, despite orthodox accusations, most Renaissance humanists possessed a deep totalising religious commitment, in which all aspects of nature interpenetrated as signs of God’s glorious being. Tribal and ancient dialectical thought, the ultimate source of the thinking of Renaissance humanists, eventually became the preserve of an occult aristocracy, whose mode of thought was, like Aristotelianism, by and large too poetic, one-sidedly qualitative and abstract to be of much use in expanding natural science. The life of the intellectual who turned his, or very occasionally her, back on the Church was financially insecure, and marginalised thinkers found themselves in the company of charlatans, who made a living by peddling quack remedies, telling fortunes and the like.

However, during the Renaissance a small number of humanist, yet profoundly religious, proto-scientists employed a dialectical mode of thought based on natural magic, alchemy and crucially Pythagorean numerology, and applied this to natural phenomena. Coupled with alchemic theory, gained partly from observation and early forms of experiment, their totalising world view allowed

them to make progress with astronomical, chemical and problems which the Aristotelian approach failed to solve. Rejecting the mechanistic world view, Galileo insisted on life and growth:

It is my opinion that the Earth is very noble and admirable by reason of the many and different alterations, mutations, and generations which incessantly occur in it, quoted on page 229 of de Santillana.

Boas (1970), despite her positivist leanings, acknowledges that humanists like Pico attacked those occult practices, such as determinist astrology, which were methodologically suspect and brought no practical results. She admits that alchemists, particularly the followers of Paracelsus, sought practical results and brought developments in calcination, distillation, sublimation, digestion and the preparation of drugs for medical purposes. Paracelsus “has been called the first systematiser in chemistry”, page 164, and his rejection of determinist astrology is clear in the following, which captures the new humanist spirit perfectly:

Stars force us to nothing, they influence not, nor do they incline us; they are free on their own and so are we, quoted on page 195 of de Santillana.

The new natural magicians responded to the expanding needs of the merchants, artisans and manufacturers, who required knowledge for all manner of practical purposes, by developing an empirically-based experimental approach. The totalising animist theory included “sympathies, and antipathies, signatures, magnetic attractions, the virtues of stones and herbs, mechanical arts, optical illusions - all strange by-lanes of nature over which the natural magician alone had control”, Boas page 172. Natural magic and certain other occult practices eventually proved enabling for developments in mathematics and the physical sciences. Most notably were the discoveries of the alchemists and magicians Tycho, Kepler, Newton, the natural magician Gilbert and the Rosicrucian Leibniz.

Francis Bacon, whose views on “the idols” are an early example of an understanding of the concept of ideology, described natural magic as: “the science which applies the knowledge of hidden forms to production of wonderful operations; and by uniting (as they say) actives with passives, displays the wonderful works of nature”, quoted in Boas page 173. Paracelsus similarly spoke about “the invisible”, which he saw as at one with “the visible”, anticipating the contemporary view that these invisible natural forces, such as magnetism, electricity and gravity,

are *theoretical* entities. One is reminded of the oppositions which these forces contain, in another example of the occasionally dialectical thinking of Bacon:

It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception: for when one body is applied to another, there is a kind of election to embrace that which is agreeable, and to exclude or expel that which is ingrate; and whether the body be alterant or altered, evermore a perception precedeth operation; for else all bodies would be alike one to another, quoted in de Santillana page 36.

Descartes' method as the antithesis of dialectics

as to false doctrines, I thought that I already knew well enough what they were worth to be subject to deception neither by the promises of an alchemist, the predictions of an astrologer, the impostures of a magician, the artifices or the empty boastings of any of those who make a profession of knowing that of which they are ignorant, Descartes (1997) *Discourse on Method*, page 76.

Descartes rejected mysticism and the occult in his writings and visualised the universe as a machine. Every action involving matter was purely mechanistic, and matter had no contact with spirit. To Descartes, all animals - including humans - were also machines. Humans had a spiritual aspect, a soul, but this had no link with our physical selves, White (1997) page 39.

René Descartes, 1596-1650, rejected his father's wish for him to join the legal profession. Because of his inherited property he was able to become a travelling soldier, mathematician, natural philosopher and gentleman. The rejection of medieval thought led him to adopt the kind of analysis which prefigured the rational individualism of the Enlightenment. Although he experienced fashionable Parisian society, becoming bored Descartes moved to Holland, known for its liberal intellectual atmosphere and its distance from the watchful eye of the Inquisition, which arrested Galileo and burned Bruno. During Descartes' youthful years Europe slid into the Thirty Years War, and this, coupled with a personality which showed signs of isolation and insecurity, could, according to some commentators, have stimulated his adoption of a philosophy based on an obsession for certainty. The need for certainty was best fulfilled by a retreat to the abstract entities and deductive logic of mathematics. As prefigured in his famous dream, Descartes believed that scientific experiment could be eschewed and natural philosophy could be reduced to a description

of the universe by a combination of a machine metaphor and a system of interlocking vortices. Though his mathematics is still used today, Descartes' scientific theories are of interest only as historical curios.

Instead of embracing the Renaissance humanist synthesis, Descartes combined a mechanist-mathematical view of nature, including its highest manifestation the human body, with an orthodox, yet liberal, Catholicism. However, his view of matter, influenced by the work of the Renaissance astronomers, was notable for its lack of a role for God, and as a result Descartes was accused of atheism, a lesser charge than heresy. He sublimated the reality of his contradictory dualistic relationship with the Papacy and the Dutch authorities on the one hand, and a growing materialist, and increasingly secular, natural philosophy on the other. Specifically, Descartes developed the idea of another world, the indivisible, unextended world of *mind*, paralleling the world of divisible, extended matter. Although he was reputed to have become a Rosicrucian, it made little impression on either his metaphysical dualism or his deductive approach to logic. Unlike Plato's dualism, in which the material world was fleeting and inferior, for Descartes both sides of the polar opposition had equal status, however, he could find no adequate linking mechanism between the two.

The formulation of the Cartesian Method, based on the application of mathematical axioms and inferences, began in his earliest important work, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. The book, with its search for "perfect knowledge", begins by stressing the importance of trusting "only what is completely known and incapable of doubt...there are more of these than they think - truths which suffice to give a rigorous demonstration of innumerable propositions", Descartes (1997) page 5. How little Descartes understood the work of the Sophist Protagoras is clear in a quote from the same page: "whenever two men come to opposite decisions about the same matter one of them at least must certainly be in the wrong". He says that the two "most certain routes to knowledge" are *intuition*, which is "not the fluctuating testimony of the senses, not the misleading judgment that proceeds from the blundering constructions of imagination, but the conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about that which we understand", page 9; and *deduction*, which is "necessary inference from other facts that are known with certainty", page 10. Though, no doubt in fear of the Inquisition, he adds: "But all this does not prevent us from believing matters that have been divinely revealed as being more certain than our surest knowledge", page 11.

Despite this thoroughly undialectical method, which proved to be of little use in terms of Descartes' contribution to natural science, Cottingham, in Vesey (1986), has surprisingly argued for Descartes as a dialectician in the *Meditations*. Cottingham argues:

*This twisting and turning of argument and counter-argument - the setting up of one position which is immediately knocked down, the reaching of a conclusion which immediately needs modifying...A proposition or a definition is put forward only to be attacked; as a result of the attack, it is revised, and then the revision is in turn criticised and subsequently modified. In Plato's writings, this cut and thrust of refutation and counter-refutation is especially vivid, because the train of the argument is presented in dialogue form...But although the *Meditations* themselves are not explicitly cast in dialogue form, the presentation of successive arguments and counter-arguments is highly 'dialectical'...it is often disastrous to lift a given proposition or conclusion out of the *Meditations* and quote it as if it represented Descartes' final and considered philosophical view...The work, as its name implies, is not a set of finished doctrines, but a series of mental exercises which have to be worked through, pages 79-80.*

In response to this view, an upbeat approach to the "twisting and turning" of the *Meditations* does have some basis, but is generally unwarranted. The work is written in a rather pedestrian style and the arguments rarely, if ever, come to life. To the extent that the text is an implicit dialogue, the arguments, outlined in the third chapter, against Plato's explicit dialogues are germane, but a more productive way of understanding Descartes' method, which does contain contradictions, is to relate his method to both his biography and the socio-economic conditions of his time. Robinson (1953) points out that Descartes' method does not stand up well to a comparison with Plato's dialectic, because Descartes claims that the correct logical method is "something plain and obvious", and takes the view that:

By such a method I understand sure and easy rules such that, if anyone follows them exactly, he will never falsely take anything for true, and, without any useless expenditure of mental effort, gradually and continuously increasing his knowledge, will attain a true apprehension of everything of which he is capable, quoted on page 73 of Robinson.

It seems hard to believe that Plato, whatever the debate about his dialectical method, would have agreed with this. To suggest that the secrets of nature, or indeed those of the capitalist mode of production, can be uncovered by the dogmatic application of "sure and easy rules", or even the less

rigid method of the *Discourse on Method*, which comes closest to a “dialectical” method, is a view which is difficult to sustain. Nature and capitalist society are extremely complex processes, and are therefore hardly likely to be understood by the universal application of Descartes’ method. It is a key claim of this text, and one which cannot be stressed too much, that the study of complex objects such as these, requires the application of a method of presentation adequate to their level of complexity, and only dialectics is appropriate to the task.

The “horrible heresies” of Baruch Spinoza

I do not separate God from nature, Spinoza quoted in Klever page 25.

Nothing human is alien to me, Spinoza, quoted in Klever page 44.

those things which have connections with other things, as do all things that exist in Nature, which are intelligible and their objective essences have the same connections, that is other ideas are deduced from them, which again have connections with others, and so instruments for proceeding further increase, Spinoza, quoted in Harris (1995) page 6.

His philosophy was not a kind of “armchair philosophy”, far away from the center of natural science. On the contrary, he conceived and practised a type of philosophy which was continuous with what we call today “natural science”, Klever page 28.

The discussion in *Spinoza’s life and works* by Klever, Garrett (1996), uncovers useful new material bearing upon the dialectical method of the Dutch thinker. Klever begins by linking Spinoza to his Jewish forbears who had originated from the relatively liberal environment of Islamic Spain. The young Baruch rejected training for the rabbinate, opting instead for a career in his father’s business, thus exposing him to the liberal attitudes of some of the merchants. Spinoza learned Latin, adopted a secular republican political philosophy and was particularly attracted to the new, fashionable views of Descartes, whose ideas seemed to challenge religious orthodoxy. However, a physical assault by one of the business’s debtors seems to be one reason for his decision to leave the commercial world, reject both an academic appointment and all claims on his inheritance, and to live instead by grinding lenses. Soon after this, Spinoza began to turn his back on the Jewish faith and challenge the local rabbis. As his interest in natural philosophy developed, the rabbis

excommunicated Spinoza because of his “wrong opinions and behaviour...the horrible heresies which he practiced and taught, and of the monstrous actions which he performed”, Klever page 16.

Overtures by Christians were rejected by Spinoza, and he was soon to be branded as an atheistic overthrower of all doctrines contained in the New and Old Testaments. Eventually rejecting Cartesianism, he came to believe in a monist approach to nature in which mind, including the mind of God, and matter were at one. Despite the fact that, before the French invasion of the mid 17th century, Holland enjoyed the reputation of being the most liberal country in Europe, freethinkers were arrested, executed or hounded to suicide for their views. Because of the hatred of the theologians who tried to mobilise the political authorities against him, Spinoza was cautious about putting his views in print. It is likely that Spinoza, like Bruno before him, subscribed to esoteric doctrines, but was even more secretive about these views than, as we shall see, Newton was to be. According to contemporary accounts Spinoza “behaves quite sincerely and lives without doing harm to other people; and he occupies himself with the construction of telescopes and microscopes...They don’t preach openly atheism, because they often speak about God, but by God they do understand nothing else than this whole universe”, quoted in Klever page 24. Eventually Spinoza went into print with his *Theological-Political Treatise* which, because of its call for religious freedom and moral relativism, was immediately condemned as “the vilest and most sacrilegious book the world has ever seen”, page 40. Fear of persecution led Spinoza to heed advice from friends not to publish his other finished work, the *Ethics*, which only appeared after his death in 1677.

Spinoza’s *Correspondence* (1966) contains an exchange of letters with Blyenbergh, in which the latter exposes a number of contradictions in the theological views of Spinoza. These contradictions occur in the debates on God’s perfection, His relationship with human evil and freedom and determinism, and anticipate Kant’s antinomies. Despite its rather scholastic flavour, the discussion contains the distinctions between essence and appearance, positive and negative, and in particular raises the question put by Blydenbergh: “what you really mean by a Negation in God”, page 171. Spinoza’s reply admits that he does “not understand Holy Scripture although I have spent some years in the study of it”, page 172. He distinguishes between privation, which is “only a simple and mere lack...for example, that a blind man is deprived of sight because we easily imagine him as seeing...(it) is nothing else than denying of a thing something which we judge to pertain to its nature”, pages 174-5, and negation, which “is nothing else than denying something of a thing

because it does not belong to its nature”, page 175. In a letter to Hudde, page 224, Spinoza anticipates Hegel when he says that “extension negates thought of itself, this in itself is no perfection in it”. But it is in his famous reply to Jelles that Spinoza is most forthcoming on the subject of negation:

..he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God, or is speaking of Him inappropriately. As regards this, that figure is a negation, and not something positive, it is clearly evident that the totality of matter, considered without limitation, can have no figure and that figure has a place only in finite and limited bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure wants to express thereby nothing else than that he is apprehending a limited thing, and how it is limited. The limitation, therefore, does not belong to the thing in virtue of its being, but, on the contrary, it is its not-being. Since, then, figure is nothing but limitation and limitation is negation, therefore, as has been said, it can be nothing but negation, page 270.

We may note here that the verb *to limit* is better translated as *to determine*, and in this context Marx makes the following point: *This identity of production and consumption amounts to Spinoza's thesis: “determinatio est negatio”, Marx (1973) page 90. The editor's footnote to this says “‘Determination is negation’, i.e., given the undifferentiated self-identity of the universal world substance, to attempt to introduce particular determinations is to negate this self-identity. (Spinoza, Letters, No 50, to J. Jelles, 2 June 1674.)”.*

It is notable that the way in which Spinoza articulates his monist dialectical doctrine of substance, which came to be known as pantheism, owes more to the metaphysical categories of medieval Aristotelianism and the ontological argument for the existence of God, than it does to either neo-Platonism, or the Kabbalah, which Spinoza claimed to have rejected. Fischer (1931) explains that whilst Spinoza's system is abstract and obscure, it is superior to that of Descartes', in that the former adopts a totalising view of reality, explaining everything as part of an interdependent whole or *substance*, i.e. God, whereas for Descartes there exists a fixed duality between mind and nature. The defining characteristics of substance for Spinoza are logical independence and, though he gives no explanation of this, a sense of “in itself”. He opposes Cartesian dualism with two interpenetrating aspects of substance which he calls thought and extension. “Looked at from the one side everything simultaneously is thought, and, from the other side, body. Thus the uncompromising substantial cleavage has been removed: thought and extension, soul and body, are

now two entities each of which is the condition of the other; and they are both completely absorbed in one Whole, while at the same time they are completely contrary”, Fischer page 228.

In his introduction to the *Ethics*, in Spinoza (undated) Gregory, along with Harris (1995), show that despite Spinoza's claim that his method is “geometrical”, i.e. following the mathematical system of axiom and inference, this is clearly not the case. Spinoza actually uses an interlocking network of tautologies, as each circular argument develops the truth of each axiom and deduction is confirmed in the expanding interlocking circles. The approach rejects the separation between subject and object, or thought and extension, from which was to come the positivist correspondence theory of truth. Desire, love and will, as well as cause and effect, are what link the attributes of Spinoza's substance. Rather than using conventional deduction or induction, about which he has strong misgivings, Spinoza begins instead by identifying the essence of an attribute, what it truly is. Harris explains that the connections between attributes, which in turn form systematic concrete wholes, or what later dialecticians called “concrete universals”, are identified. The method develops by use of interpenetrating oppositions between the whole and the part, antecedent and consequent and the infinite and the finite, in what Harris calls a “crypto-dialectical development”, page 13. He adds: “The argument will unfold ‘in fuller degree as it proceeds’ the implications of the ordered whole”, page 18.

Harris sums up Spinoza's “crypto-dialectical development”:

Because of Spinoza's preference for the geometrical manner of exposition, the dialectical character of this development is obscured and remains hidden, but it requires not much perspicacity to recognize it. Because the whole and its self-specification is the wellspring of dialectic, Spinoza's insistence on Substance as his starting point, and his specification of it into attributes and modes as he explicates its structural order, supply the framework of a dialectical system that from time to time becomes evident, breaking through the geometrical disguise, as in the passages to which attention has been drawn, page 19.

Explaining the purpose of his *Ethics*, Spinoza wants to know “as much of the nature of things as is necessary...to infer rightly from it the differences, agreements and oppositions of things” quoted in Klever page 53. The *Ethics*, especially the totalising idea of Substance, had a major effect on the development of German idealist philosophy, affecting Lessing, Fichte, and Hegel amongst others. However, Engels, who called Spinoza “the splendid representative of dialectics” in the *Anti-*

Duhring, inspired Russian philosophers to systematically distort his views. Plekhanov, for example, treated Spinoza's substance as a precursor of his brand of vulgar materialism. Spinoza's idea that God exists in everything is interpreted by Leninists, as by Spinoza's orthodox religious contemporaries, as atheism. However, whilst this tells us much about Leninist atheism, it conveys little of Spinoza's beliefs: "in the USSR of the twenties, the different philosophical camps (mechanists and dialecticians) each constructed an image of Spinozism and its place in the history of thought that brought comfort to their own positions", Moreau, in Garrett (1996) page 427. Spinoza himself stated that: "Those who think that the argument of the *Tractatus* rests on the identification of God with nature, taking nature in the sense of a certain mass of corporeal matter, are entirely wrong", quoted by Gregory, without a source, in Spinoza (undated), page viii.

Gregory is persuasive when he explains the meaning of God for Spinoza:

Whereas in common speech, the word God ranks as a noun so that theologians will make Him the subject or object of quite ordinary predicates with astonishing facility, Spinoza thinks of God rather as a verb and of all existent things as modes of the activity. The world is not a collection of things but a conflagration of Act whose innumerable flames are but one fire...We are not names but acts, not spectators but part of the game, and we exist as we play it. We do not think from noun to noun forging a chain of logical or mechanical connections between each. Nor are we blank entities waiting to be furnished, nor self-contained objects that collide with one another. We are acts of God or modes of an eternal intellection whose activity knows no limit, in Spinoza (undated) pages x and xii.

Negri (1991) provides an unusual interpretation of Spinoza. The manuscript was written whilst the author was undergoing the burden of imprisonment and, perhaps as a result, the text is wordy and opaque. As was fashionable amongst the radical intelligentsia at the time, the book is peppered with structuralist buzzwords, such as *problematic*, *superstructure* and *overdetermine*, whilst the word *dialectic* often seems to be little more than an ornament. Negri fails to see the Aristotelian influence on Spinoza, instead wrongly suggesting a neo-Platonist lineage. Nonetheless it is clear that Negri is presenting Spinoza as an important thinker who anticipates the revolutionary dialectic:

All of the antagonistic force of innovative thought in the Modern age, the popular and proletarian origins of its revolutions and the entire arc of republican positions from Machiavelli to the young Marx, is concentrated in this exemplary Spinozan experience. Who can deny that, also in this

sense, Spinoza remains in the middle of contemporary philosophical debates, almost like a young Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem? page xix.

However, Negri is simply wrong to equate dialectics with bourgeois thought when he claims, in an exaggerated style, that:

The paradox of Spinoza's thought can be seen in this aspect: his philosophy is presented to us as postbourgeois philosophy. Machery calls it a post-dialectical philosophy. And so it is, because the dialectic is the form in which bourgeois ideology is always presented to us in all of its variants - even in those of the purely negative dialectic of crisis and war. The materialistic transfiguration that Spinoza accomplishes on the revolutionary contents of humanism pushes his philosophy beyond any dialectical form, beyond any overdetermined mediation - that is to say, beyond the concept of the bourgeoisie as it has come to be formed in a hegemonic way in recent centuries, page 20.

Gottfried Leibniz, dialectics and the sterile synthesis of logic and mathematics

..all bodies are in a perpetual flux like rivers, and parts are passing in and out of them continually, Leibniz (1973), paraphrasing Heraclitus, page 190.

Leibniz, who was born in the middle of the 17th century, came from an academic German family. As Germany was a relative backwater at this time, its philosophical language being similarly underdeveloped, his family did its best to see that their son acquired its relative privileges by learning Latin, Greek, theology and logic. However, despite his classical learning, Leibniz was never able to obtain an academic post and with it the freedom to study at will. Consequently, he had to be content with the frustration of working in the legal profession, or for wealthy patrons. Yet Leibniz became a polymath and devised lots of ambitious research schemes, such as using deductive logic to solve the issue of the Polish succession.

His interest in logic was apparent from “the age of thirteen (when) he was already trying to improve on the Aristotelian theory of the categories”, MacDonald Ross (1984) page 3. Leibniz held liberal religious views and was interested in the theory of alchemy, although he probably did no experiments. However, in contrast to Newton, the dialectical aspects of his alchemic thought were kept separate from his orthodox logical methods. The main influence of alchemy was on his

metaphysical ideas on monads, which were limited microcosms of the universe at large. Neo-Pythagoreanism seems to have been important to his thought, in that he considered number as fundamental to the universe; whilst, like Descartes, he believed that the most efficient logical method was to apply the mathematical approach of axiom and inference.

There are occasional passages in Leibniz (1973) which either show the influence of esoteric thought, or are overtly dialectical, such as the following from *Monadology* which implicitly describes internal contradiction:

..every monad must be different from every other. For there are never in nature two beings which are precisely alike, and in which it is not possible to find some difference which is internal, or based on some intrinsic denomination. I also take it as granted that every created thing, and consequently the created monad also, is subject to change, and indeed that this change is continual in each one. It follows from what we have just said, that the natural changes of monads come from an internal principle, since an external cause would be unable to influence their inner being... This differentiation must involve a plurality within the unity or the simple. For since every natural change takes place by degrees, something changes, and something remains, page 180.

Leibniz consolidates this view, and anticipates Hegel, when he explains that monads contain “a self-sufficiency in them which makes them the sources of their internal actions...every state of a simple substance is a natural consequence of its preceding state, so that the present state of it is big with the future”, pages 181-2. On the dialectical theme of vantage point Leibniz says: “what is active in certain aspects is passive from another point of view: *active* in so far as what is distinctly known in it explains what occurs in another, and *passive* in so far as the reason for what occurs in it is found in what is distinctly known in another...Now this *connexion* or adaptation of all created things with each, and of each with all the rest, means that each simple substance has relations which express all the others, and that consequently it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe...(there is) universal harmony, which causes each substance exactly to express all the others through the relations which it has with them...each created monad represents the whole universe”, page 187-9.

In his approach to natural philosophy Leibniz was in some ways closer to Descartes than to Newton. However, although his theories were more detailed than Newton's he lacked the latter's power of abstraction:

it was this very ambition that prevented him from matching the achievement of Newton. Newton succeeded in producing a comprehensive theory of kinematics precisely because he avoided 'inventing hypotheses' about dynamics, or the powers and mechanisms underlying the kinematics. It was only by simplifying the issues in this way, that Newton succeeded in reducing them to manageable proportions, MacDonald Ross, page 44.

From the perspective of contemporary formal logic, Leibniz anticipated 19th and 20th century contributions to mathematicising symbolic logical relationships. Leibniz was aware that Aristotelian logic had become sterile compared to the more pragmatic approaches to method being pioneered by the later Renaissance natural philosophers, which were delivering practical results. Leibniz, like Descartes, tried in vain to find a water-tight logic of discovery, based on his idea that logical problems would all eventually be solved because, he believed, language was gradually developing to a state of perfection. The growing success in data classification techniques caused Leibniz to develop the method of division, based on that used by Plato and Aristotle. This led to the *Principle of the Identity of Indiscernables*, or Leibniz's Law as it is known today. The Principle uses division to try to identify the most basic species, reasoning that "a lowest species could not have more than one member: if two things were distinct individuals, there had to be something that was true of the one but not true of the other, thereby making them of different species", MacDonald Ross, page 53.

Leibniz never fully overcame scholastic thought, he seemed to be rehearsing the medieval realism-nominalism debate in his discussion of the problems arising from the lack of distinction between existing things and imaginary things, such as unicorns. This led to a discussion of the distinction between necessary and contingent truths. Truths were necessary if they could not be otherwise without contradiction, which for Leibniz meant *logical error*. These are contrasted with contingent truths, where things could be otherwise without contradiction. The distinction was to prove important in the later work of Hume, and Kant used the terms analytic and synthetic as an equivalent for Leibniz's two categories. Leibniz developed a mechanical method for showing that necessary truths, or other relevant propositions, could be shown to be identities. The static side of his thinking is apparent when Leibniz says:

The only proposition of which the contrary implies a contradiction without one's being able to demonstrate it, is one of formal identity. The identity is formulated explicitly in the proposition, so it cannot be demonstrated - demonstrated, that is, made evident by reason and inferences. Here

the identity can be made visible to the eye, so in this case it cannot be demonstrated. The senses make it evident that a is a is a proposition of which the opposite, a is not-a, formally implies a contradiction. But that which the senses make evident is indemonstrable. So the real, indemonstrable axioms are identical propositions, quoted in MacDonald Ross page 63.

Given Leibniz's preoccupation with number, it is no surprise that he developed a system of analysing the terms of propositions, using positive and negative numbers then multiplying them together. This "clumsy", to use MacDonald Ross's term, piece of Pythagorean numerology was apparently simplified, yet actually compounded, by the use of a binary system, using 0 and 1, for similar tasks, including the analysis of syllogisms. Although he anticipated both the use of Venn diagrams in logic and the ideas of mathematical logicians like Frege and Boole, even the hagiographer MacDonald Ross has to admit that "Leibniz did not in fact get very far with his logical calculus", page 70.

Isaac Newton's dialectical method of presentation

(Truth is) the offspring of silence and unbroken meditation. Isaac Newton, quoted in White (1997) page 43.

Mercury is not, finally, a substance, or even many substances: it is a process...All these (alchemical writings) point to one crucial idea: that transformation is something intrinsic and contained inside matter...Each stage of this self-devouring, self-generating process bears the name 'mercury'. Mercury, in short, is alchemy itself, Charles Nicholl in *The Chemical Theatre*, quoted in White page 141.

God, being present everywhere by His will, moves all bodies in His infinite, uniform sensorium, and so shapes and reshapes according to His pleasure all parts of the universe, much more than our soul by its will is able to move the limbs of our body, Newton *Opticks*, quoted in Walker (1972) pages 255-6.

(Newton) had spent more of his life intensely involved with alchemy than he had delving into the clear blue waters of pure science. It also confirmed what a few of Newton's close friends had

known during his lifetime: that he had expended a vast amount of his time studying the chronology of the Bible, examining prophecy, investigating natural magic, and, most of all, attempting to unravel the hermetic secrets - the prisca sapientia, White, page 2, commenting on information found in Newton's library.

(Newton) was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, the last great mind which looked out on the visible and the intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago, John Maynard Keynes, quoted in White page 3.

The fellows of the Royal Society during the seventeenth century were almost all gentlemen scholars and academics from Oxford and Cambridge. This was an age racked by plague and constant petty wars between European states, an era during which 90 per cent of the population lived in what we would now consider abject poverty while the lucky remainder dabbled in business affairs and intellectual pursuits. White page 171.

We must remember that Newton discovered the concept of gravitation and also its laws by taking into account three groups of phenomena which are entirely unrelated to the merely perceptive observer: freely falling objects, the movements of the planets, and the alternation of the tides, Frankfort (1946), page 15, illustrating both Newton's totalising method and his distinction between the empirical and the occult.

Isaac Newton (1642-1727), as White (1997) points out, is presented by positivistic science as the paradigm for theory- and value-independent observation, "the model for the scientific method", page 2. The reality is very different, partly because Newton was a supporter of the Arian religion, which rejected the Holy Trinity doctrine and believed that Christ, as the first creature created by God, controlled the forces of nature. Since Newton believed that the aether was Christ's body, it is no surprise that Arianism, along with the related Socinianism, was declared to be heretical by orthodox Christianity. However, he synthesised Arianism with the practice of alchemy, which was illegal in England from 1404-1689, a belief in natural magic, Hermeticism (note the term *hermetically sealed* from alchemy), and other esoteric ideas. He was aware of ancient Egyptian thought, but attributed it to Moses and Solomon, thereby giving it the sanction of the Old Testament, and making it more consistent with Christianity. Although Newton showed great

caution in revealing his true beliefs, it is clear from his writing that they included the tribal and ancient idea of hidden 'forces' or 'spirits', which profoundly affected his work: "the influence of Newton's researches in alchemy was the key to his world-changing discoveries in science. His alchemical work and his science were inextricably linked...he was interested in a synthesis of all knowledge and was a devout seeker of some form of unified theory of the principles of the universe", White pages 5 and 106.

Newton (1955) contains extracts from some of his texts on alchemy, which he contrasts with "vulgar chemistry", including the following dialectical method of presentation from his *Of Natures Obvious Laws and Processes in Vegetation*. He speaks of earth as resembling "a great animall or rather inanimate vegetable, draws in aethereall breath for its dayly refreshment and vital ferment... This is the subtil spirit which searches the most hiden recesses of all grosser matter which enters their smallest pores and divides them more subtly then any other materiall power what ever (not after the way of common menstruums by rending them violently assunder etc) this is Natures universal agent, her secret fire, the onely ferment and principle of all vegetation (or animation-S.S). The material soule of all matter which being constantly inspired from above pervades and concretes with it into one form...heate exites light and light exites heat, heat excites the vegetable principle and that increaseth heat. Noe substance soe indifferently, subtly and swiftly pervades all things as light and noe spirit searches bodys so subtly percingly and quickly as the vegetable spirit... Nothing can be changed from what it is without putrefaction (the tendency to return to chaos or the Egyptian nun – S.S.), no putrefaction can be without alienating the thing putrefyed from what was", pages 304-5.

Keynes' remarked that Newton "regarded the universe as a cryptogram set by the Almighty – just as he himself wrapt the discovery of the calculus in a cryptogram when he communicated with Leibniz", in Newton page 315. Here Keynes is implicitly acknowledging that alchemy in effect provided Newton with a dialectical method of presentation, which contrasted with, and complemented, a more orthodox empirical method of analysis. In this way Newton used occult explanations, such as the existence of magnetic and gravitational *forces*, to explain the observed movements and cohesion of particles. In the following chiasmus from the *Opticks* Newton hints at alchemy: "The changing of bodies into light, and light into bodies, is very comfortable to the course of Nature, which seems delighted with transmutations", quoted in White page 104. The production by Newton of the Star Regulus of Antimony in 1670, with its suggested lines of force, "was

probably one step along this road - a subconscious contribution to the slow process of realisation firstly of attraction and then of universal gravitation”, White page 146. Speaking of alchemy late in his life Newton said: “That study (is) fruitful of experiments”, quoted on page 121. “(Newton) was gaining an instinctive awareness of possible forces at work in the universe for which conventional mechanical theory (still dominated by Descartes’ notion of matter and spirit) had no explanation. He was seeing things in the crucible that could not be explained by Descartes or by an orthodox appraisal of simplistic atomism”, White page 149.

White realises alchemy’s contribution to the development of technology, laboratory techniques and equipment, but is alternately enthusiastic and dismissive of the subject. He does not perceive the dialectical aspects of alchemic thought, claiming instead that “the alchemical tradition is so illogical”, page 122. Fortunately Newton did not accept such a view of alchemy; he used it to take a totalising approach to natural philosophy, claiming that all natural phenomena were part of an observable interconnecting process. Newton believed that this process possessed a deeper reality, which he called the Absolute that emanated from God. He gives a clue to his beliefs in one of the ways in which he uses the word *hypothesis*, i.e. where a hypothesis refers to a phenomenon whose qualities are unmeasurable, they are defined as “occult qualities”. Leibniz, who was to be involved in a bitter dispute with Newton over invention of the calculus, spoke of a “rebirth in England of a theology that is more than papist and a philosophy entirely scholastic since Mr Newton and his partisans have revived the occult qualities of the school with the idea of attraction”, quoted in White page 303. White further explains:

Without his in-depth knowledge of alchemy (which he practised during the 1670s and ‘80s), he would almost certainly never have expanded the limited notion of planetary motion as he saw it in 1665/6 into the grand concepts of universal gravitation, of attraction and repulsion, and of action at a distance. Finally, if the experimental evidence had not been gathered, then Newton’s theories, even if substantiated by mathematics, would not have carried the weight they did in his Principia, nor would they have so readily inspired the practical application of mechanics and the laws of motion which led, a century later, to the Industrial Revolution, page 93.

Losee (1993) shows that Newton was keen to refute the mechanistic natural philosophy of Descartes and his followers, because it had no place for God’s omnipotence. Cartesianism, like Aristotelianism, was for Newton based on dogmatic metaphysical principles rather than provable *theory*. Newton makes his totalising approach clearer in naming it the “Method of Analysis and

Synthesis”. Losee explains that the Method of Analysis, when applied to Newton’s famous one-prism light experiment, was not naïve atomistic induction, which would produce the general statement that “all prisms under similar circumstances would produce spectra similar to those he had observed”, page 86. Rather his Method involved an “inductive leap” by Newton, which according to Losee, involved knowledge about the fundamental nature of light, specifically:

that sunlight is made up of rays which have different refractive properties. After all, other interpretations of the evidence are possible. Newton could have concluded, for instance, that sunlight is indivisible, and that the spectral colours are produced instead by some sort of secondary radiation within the prism, page 86.

Losee goes on to explain Newton’s Method of Synthesis, by which the latter meant generalising results, whilst, using this property of light to examine other phenomena, also using deduction:

He noted that if his theory were correct, then passing light of a particular colour through a prism should result in a deflection of the beam through the angle characteristic of that colour, but no resolution of the beam into other colours. Newton confirmed this consequence of his theory of colours by passing light from one small band of the spectrum through a second prism, page 86.

Newton’s theory of colour mixing is summarised in a diagram, presented on page 91 of Losee, which looks very much like an astrological chart. Clearly Newton’s two “Methods” do not refer to naïve induction and syllogistic deduction respectively, both are complex and involve a network of interlocking theory, observation and experiment, and far from being mutually exclusive, both Methods interpenetrate. Losee shows how far the Method of Analysis is from naïve induction using the law of inertia, which shows how a body behaves when not being influenced by any external force. Newton formulated his first law using *abstraction*, a theoretical method which will be discussed in later chapters, because he saw that *observation* of this law was by definition impossible. Speaking of inert bodies, Newton knew that:

no such bodies exist. And even if such a body did exist, we could have no knowledge of it. Observation of a body requires the presence of an observer or some recording apparatus. But on Newton’s own view, every body in the universe exerts a gravitational attractive force on every other body. An observed body cannot be free of impressed forces. Consequently, the law of inertia is not a generalisation about the observed motions of particular bodies. It is, rather, an abstraction from such notions..Moreover, Newton maintained that the three laws of absolute

motion specify how bodies move in Absolute Space and Absolute Time. This is a further abstraction on Newton's part, Losee, page 87-8, (my emphasis).

Losee gets to the heart of the matter as he continues:

Newton contrasted Absolute Space and Time with their "sensible measures" which are determined experimentally. Newton's distinction between the "true motions" of bodies in Absolute Space and Time and the "sensible measures" of these motions has a Platonic ring that suggests a dichotomy of reality and appearance. On Newton's view, Absolute Space and Absolute Time are ontologically prior to individual substances and their interactions. He believed, moreover, that an understanding of sensible motions can be achieved in terms of true motions in Absolute Space...Newton was convinced that Absolute Space must exist, and he advanced both theological arguments and physical arguments for its existence, but he was less certain that bodies could be located in this space...He suggested that Absolute Space is an "emanent effect" of the Creator, a "disposition of all being" which is neither an attribute of God nor a substance coeternal with God, pages 88-9.

Such an approach to natural philosophy, or science as it later came to be known, owes much to neo-Platonism with its opposition between an unchanging timeless being and the fleeting world of appearances. As we shall see, the theme was to be developed further in the German Enlightenment. The following remarks from Losee's book suggest that Newton thought about the microcosm-macrocosm relationship in the context of the qualities of matter:

In Query 31 of the Opticks, he set forth a research programme to uncover the forces that govern the interactions of the minute part of bodies. Newton expressed the hope that the study of short-range forces would achieve an integration of physico-chemical phenomena...It is true that Newton did suggest that if we could know the forces that operate on the minute particles of matter, we could understand why macroscopic processes occur in the ways they do, page 98.

A number of writers, starting with William Law, argued that Jacob Boehme influenced Newton's laws of gravity, based on simultaneous attraction and the "secret principle of unsociableness", as Newton called repulsion, of planets. Although there is no clear evidence for these claims, Newton's totalising approach, as we have seen, owed much to his studies of esoteric thought. It could equally be argued that Newton's synthesis of atomism and neo-Platonism was influenced by Bruno's pantheism. White claims that Newton was influenced by the English alchemist and Rosicrucian

Robert Fludd, whereas Walker (1972) mentions Newton's universal thought in discussing the work of the early 18th century Scottish mystic Ramsay, who refers to Newton's changes of mind about the esoteric aether-based, or spiritual, theory of gravitation. Ramsay rejected the orthodox idea that Newton was a mechanist, claiming instead that his philosophy of nature contains an interplay between freedom and necessity :

Newton is used to confirm Zoroaster's argument that the first cause of the universe cannot be 'the mere laws of matter and motion', but is the work of God, who governs it by general laws, which are nevertheless 'free, arbitrary and even diversify'd in the different regions of immensity according to the effects he wou'd there produce...' The passage quoted here from the 1717 edition of the Optics, while affirming that the first cause of natural phenomena is not mechanical but an 'incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent Being', again introduces Newton's theory of infinite space being God's sensorium...Newton is again praised for opposing Descartes' strictly mechanical universe, Walker pages 256-7.

White quotes the following, complete with chiasmi, to summarise what we can see is Newton's dialectical attitude to nature:

For nature is a perpetual circulatory worker, generating fluids out of solids, and solids out of fluids, fixed things out of volatile, & volatile out of fixed, subtle out of gross, & gross out of subtle, some things to ascend & make the upper terrestrial juices, rivers and the atmosphere; & by consequence other to descend for a requital to the former, Newton, quoted on pages 208-9.

Newton was aware of the ancient distinction between the microcosm, which he had explored by means of the alchemic crucible, and the macrocosm, but attempted to integrate the two in what is today called a "theory of everything":

Whatever reasoning holds for greater motions, should hold for lesser ones as well. The former depends on the greater attractive forces of larger bodies, and I suspect that the latter depend upon the lesser forces, as yet unobserved, of insensible particles. For, from the forces of gravity, of magnetism and of electricity it is manifest that there are various kinds of natural forces, and that there may be still more kinds is not to be rashly denied. It is very well known that greater bodies act mutually upon each other by those forces, and I do not clearly see why lesser ones should not act on one another by similar forces, Newton, quoted in White page 225.

I end this section by pointing out an important contradiction noted by White:

Ironically, although Newton was largely responsible for the development of the scientific enlightenment which swept away the common belief in magic and mysticism, he created the origins of empirical science and modern, 'rational' world in part by immersing himself in these very practices, pages 105-6.

Bernard Mandeville's articulation of the contradictions of capitalism

the seeming Paradox, the Substance of which is advanc'd in the Title Page; that Private Vices by the dextrous Management of a skilful Politician may be turn'd into Publick Benefits, Mandeville (1989) page 34.

Religion is one thing and Trade is another, Mandeville page 23.

Thus thousands give Money to Beggars from the same motive as they pay their Corn-cutter, to walk Easy...(the) Contradiction in the Frame of Man (in whom) the Theory of Virtue is so well understood, and the Practice of it so rarely to be met with, Mandeville page 29.

the surest wealth consists in a multitude of laborious poor...the only thing...that can render the labouring man industrious, is a moderate quantity of money, for as too little will, according as his temper is either dispirit or make him desperate, so too much will make him insolent and lazy...the greatest part of the poor should almost never be idle, and yet continually spend what they get...it is prudence to relieve, but folly to cure (their wants), Mandeville, quoted in Colletti page 205.

White points out that within thirty years after the 1666 great fire, London had become the largest city in Europe. As the balance of military and economic power shifted from Holland to England, London became Europe's banking and commercial centre. He explains:

It was a city of brutal contrasts. The entire metropolis was sustained by an underclass of labourers and servants most of whom lived in the liberties to the east of the city. The liberties were no-go areas for the authorities and lay largely beyond the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor of London. The Liberty of the Fleet, a ghetto built around the infamous Fleet Prison, was a lawless hellhole, the last area to be touched by the great reconstruction scheme, the home of countless whores and thieves who thrived on the rich pickings to be had a few miles away in the wealthier districts. By

night the lawless worked 'up west'; by day they slept in windowless hovels lining streets awash with human waste and flood waters from the underground river Fleet. A few miles from the liberties stood the elegant homes of wealthy bankers and merchants, the open parks and the fields of Kensington and Knightsbridge, the rarefied atmosphere of the coffee-houses, where the idle rich spent long lunches in genteel chatter...Shopkeepers could no longer rely upon the cash of the purchasers, and so prices became inflated to compensate for the risk of accepting counterfeit coins. Workers were finding their weekly pay made up of tin coins or money clipped beyond recognition, and riots were becoming almost a daily occurrence, White pages 256 and 258.

Lux (1990) describes Queen Elizabeth's famous comment on the growth of "the poor" in her queendom: "Paupers are everywhere!". This led to the passing of the Poor Laws Act of 1601, which encoded the feudal paternalistic attitude to poor relief. During and after the Civil War the Act fell into disuse and was in practice replaced by the dreaded workhouses, which were in effect prisons for "the poor". It was against this backdrop that a qualified medical doctor from Holland, Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), came to London and soon achieved notoriety. Mandeville was influenced by the Jansenist view that man, after the fall, was utterly depraved and self-interested, a view he picked up from the Protestant Pierre Bayle, who had to flee to Holland from Catholic France. That Jansenist thought used dialectical formulations is clear from the following quotes from Pascal, who was a believer:

*(After showing how vile and how great man is)...Let him both hate and love himself...wretchedness and greatness can be concluded each from the other...Everything that could be said by one side as proof of greatness has only served as an argument for the others to conclude he is wretched...All is one, all is diversity...Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself...We perceive an image of the truth and possess nothing but falsehood, being equally incapable of absolute ignorance and certain knowledge, Pascal (1966), pages 60-66, the section is entitled *Contradictions*.*

*Unity added to infinity does not increase it at all, any more than a foot added to an infinite measurement: the finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite and becomes pure nothingness, Pascal, page 411, beginning *The Wager*.*

In London, earning a living by practising medicine, Mandeville began to write irregular rhyming, or doggerel, poems and other miscellaneous notes. The works were thinly veiled social, political and

economic satires, and the enlarged 1723 second edition of *The Fable of the Bees* attracted so much adverse comment that Mandeville was declared to be “Who Vice commends, MAN-DEVIL be his Name”, quoted in Mandeville (1989), page 8. Famous philosophers, like Berkeley and Hutcheson, and apologists for the rapidly developing capitalist mode of production, despised Mandeville’s openness and honesty in attacking the pride and hypocrisy he saw all round him. He also attacked the Merchantile orthodoxy, which advocated the virtue of frugality. Soon his book was translated into other European languages, and Mandeville became the most hated man in both France, where copies of the book were burned, and Germany.

Mandeville looked at early 18th century London, with its mass of half-starved workers, beggars and thieves on the one hand and rich polite society on the other, and *linked* these two contrasting social groups together. His famous paradox, *Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, which was the subtitle of *The Fable of the Bees*, drew attention to the profound social inequalities of “a trading Country”, as opposed to “a frugal and honest Society”. Mandeville not only highlighted the crimes of the pimps, pickpockets and others of the urban poor, but also the crimes of the wealthy lawyers, doctors, merchants and clergy. However, Mandeville was no vulgar moraliser, contrasting the vices of the many with the virtues of the few good citizens. Rather, he anticipated Adam Smith’s invisible hand by showing that these vices were *organically* linked to the prosperity of the rich: “Thus every Part was full of Vice, Yet the whole Mass a Paradise”, Mandeville page 16. As Harth’s introduction to the text explains, far from moralising about vice Mandeville shocked polite society by pointing out that:

The commission of crime, for example, is responsible for keeping whole multitudes at work: lawyers, gaolers, turnkeys, sergeants, bailiffs, tipstoffs, locksmiths, “and all those Officers, That squeeze a Living out of Tears”. As for the vices of luxury, avarice, prodigality, pride, envy, and vanity displayed by the more respectable members of the community, these promote trade by creating wants which it is the business of merchants, tradesmen, and manufacturers to supply...With the ensuing absence of crimes that create employment and of vices that foster trade, the professions decay, commerce dwindles, thousands of unemployed emigrate, and the hive’s prosperity comes to an end...even highwaymen encourage trade by spending lavishly what they have stolen, pages 17 and 19.

It is often claimed that the two major influence on Mandeville’s method, that of openly stating contradictions, were Machiavelli and Hobbes. Machiavelli had said that “it will be found that some

things which seem virtues would, if followed, lead to one's ruin, and some others which appear vices result in one's greater security and wellbeing", quoted in Lux page 113, Similarly Thomas Hobbes (1962) wrote about the "state of nature", a key component of which is "competition", which as Rousseau was to point out, was really an idealisation of the social struggles leading to the English civil war. Hobbes, who had to flee to France for his own safety, states in the famous chapter xiii of the *Leviathan*:

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, page 143. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud, are in war the two cardinal virtues...there be no propriety, no dominion, no mine and thine distinct; but only that to be every man's, that he can get; and for so long as he can keep it, page 145.

Mandeville not only anticipated Malthusian demand theory and the Keynesian multiplier, but went further, beyond most economists today, by exposing the hypocrisy and folly of extending charity to the poorest sections of the emerging working class, or "the Enthusiastick Passion for Charity-Schools" which had become a popular pastime for the middle classes in late 17th century Britain. The children of the most wretched parents were taken into the Schools, taught to read the Bible, given a trade apprenticeship or became servants to the rich; one journalist called this publick Spirit "the glory of the age we live in", quoted in Mandeville, page 36. Mandeville could not have disagreed more, because he claimed that the people making their petty donations to the Schools were self-satisfied hypocrites who were courting economic disaster in the name of morality and religion. Mandeville's attitude to the growing number of urban poor reveals his rejection of the last traces of the theory of rights and duties of paternalistic feudalism. Anticipating Smith, Mandeville said that "Pride and Vanity have built more Hospitals than all the Virtues together", page 37. The fact was that the wealth of 18th century Britain, of which the middle classes enjoyed a disproportionate share, was obtained by exploiting the labour of as large a number of unskilled

workers as possible. Anything that interfered with this process was detrimental to “the Community”. Mandeville explained that “In a Free Nation where Slaves are not allow’d the surest wealth consists in a multitude of Labourious Poor”, he wanted to discourage “Idleness” and exploit workers by “bringing them up in Ignorance”, page 38.

The great merit of Mandeville’s thought was that he accepted the contradictions that were already apparent in 18th century proto-capitalist society. The wealth of the new capitalists, and the comfort of the middle classes, depended entirely on expanding the mass of urban proletarians. Mandeville scandalised London’s virtuous moralisers by pointing out, with his usual bitter satire, that no amount of self-denial could change this state of affairs: “Oh! the mighty Prize we have in view for all our Self-denial! can any Man be so serious as to abstain from Laughter?”, Mandeville page 40. Although he possessed little or no knowledge of the philosophical, alchemic, or mystical concept of contradiction, the development of which we have noted, Mandeville broke away from the study of nature and sought contradictions in that most complex phenomenon: emerging capitalist *society*. Despite occasional discussions of society by Paracelsus, Bruno and others, no previous writer equalled Mandeville’s focusing of the combination of previously unknown wealth on the one hand, and grinding squalor on the other, that was to be the hallmark of capitalist social relations.

Rousseau: paradox and alienation

it was iron and corn, which first civilised men and ruined humanity, Rousseau, quoted in Colletti page 156.

what particular interests have in common is so little that it never counter-balances what they have in opposition, Rousseau, quoted in Colletti page 168.

instead of all moving toward the general good, they draw closer together only in moving away from it, quoted on page 172.

the privileged few should gorge themselves with superfluities, while the starving multitude are in want of the bare necessities of life, quoted on page 190.

Partly because 18th century France was so feudal compared to Britain, Rousseau's political economy is crude compared to that of Adam Smith. Even compared with Physiocrat *laissez-faire* theory, his economic thought is naïve. However, although he fails to match Smith's understanding of the contradictory and uneven development of capitalist productive power, Rousseau has a comprehensive understanding of the contradictions of *historical* development. He cites the constantly increasing amount of work performed by the masses since the end of hunting and gathering society, which we noted in the first chapter. This, and his political theory represents a considerable advance on that of Hobbes and Locke, not to mention Kant who came after him. Smith, and later Marx, noted Rousseau's use of contradiction in his criticisms of civil society, a view developed out of his experiences of Paris. Although his French contemporaries mockingly referred to Rousseau, who acknowledged his debt to Mandeville, as *un homme paradoxe, sophiste*, or someone displaying *l'esprit de contradiction*, these descriptions are quite correct.

In the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, in Rousseau (1979), there is a discussion of discontentment, which anticipates the term alienation, and "this feeling should be a panegyric on your first ancestors, a criticism of your contemporaries, and a terror to those who have the misfortune to come after you", page 54. He says that as man "becomes sociable and a slave he grows weak, timid and servile", from his perfectibility comes "in different ages his discoveries and his errors, his vices and his virtues, makes him at length a tyrant both over himself and over nature", pages 55-6. Rousseau continues: "the original man having vanished by degrees, society offers to us only an assembly of artificial men and factitious passions, which are the work of all these new relations, and without any real foundation in nature... Civilized man, on the other hand, is always moving, sweating, worrying, and tormenting himself to find still more laborious occupations; he works himself to death, and even hurries on towards it, to put himself in a position to live, or he renounces life to acquire immortality... Always asking others what we are, and never daring to ask ourselves... we have nothing to show for ourselves but a frivolous and deceitful appearance, honour without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness... Let us reflect what must be the state of things where all men are forced mutually to caress and destroy one another, and where they are born enemies by duty and swindlers by interest", pages 66-7.

On the underlying principle of capitalism, self interest, he says it "is purely a relative and factitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than of any other, (and) causes all the mutual damage men inflict on one another... you are undone if you

once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody”, pages 56 and 59. On the same subject Rousseau says: “all subsequent advances have been in appearance so many steps towards the perfection of the individual, but in reality towards the decrepitude of the species... It now became the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two totally different things; and from this distinction sprang insolent pomp and cheating trickery with all the numerous vices that go in their train... There arose rivalry and competition on the one hand, and conflicting interest on the other, together with a secret desire on both of profiting at the expense of others. All these evils were the first effects of property and the inseparable attendant of growing inequality”, pages 60-61.

The new political institutions of bourgeois society generate yet more paradoxes, as Rousseau explains: “All ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty... for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery and wretchedness... the magistrates fomenting everything that might weaken men united in society, by promoting dissension among them ; everything that might sow in it the seeds of actual division, while it gave society the air of harmony; everything that might injure the different ranks of people with mutual hatred and distrust, by setting the rights and interests of one against those of another, and so strengthen the power which comprehended them all”, pages 62 and 65.

Rousseau rejected social contract theory, because, with the aid of Christianity, it merely attempts to legitimate and consolidate antagonistic capitalist social relations, in which there is civil equality but inequality of property. He concludes that:

it is an astonishing thing to have made it impossible for men to live together without being constantly on their guard, usurping each other's places, deceiving, betraying and destroying each other!... where two men have common interests, a hundred thousand may be opposed to them, and the only way to succeed is to deceive or ruin them all. Such is the unhappy source of violence, betrayals, and all the horrors compelled by a state of things in which every man who pretends to work for the fortune or reputation of others, is trying only to lift his above theirs, at their expense, quoted in Colletti pages 160-1.

Rousseau speaks of the alienation of bourgeois man of civil society who:

does not know what he wants. Forever in contradiction with himself, forever veering between his inclination and his duty, he can never be either man or citizen. He can be no good to himself, or

to others. He will be a man of our times: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a Bourgeois. He will be nothing, from Émile, quoted in Colletti page 172.

On the workings of the labour market, Rousseau says that the capitalist tries to make the workers see:

either in reality or in appearance, their advantage in labouring for hi(m). It is this which renders him false and artificial with some, imperious and unfeeling with others, and lays him under a necessity of deceiving all those for whom he has occasion, when he cannot terrify them, and does not find it in his interest to serve them in reality...(The capitalist) often assumes the mask of good will; in short, with concurrence and rivalry on one side; on the other, opposition of interest, and always with concealed desire of making profits at the expense of some other person. All these evils are the first effects of property, and the inseparable attendants of beginning inequality...accumulated wealth always affords the means for accumulating still more, and it is impossible for him who has nothing to acquire anything; where the good man has no means for rising out of poverty; where the greatest cheats are the most honoured, quoted on pages 196 and 198 of Colletti.

Diderot and Rameau's Nephew

..bear in mind that in a matter as variable as behaviour there is no such thing as the absolutely, essentially, universally true or false, unless it is that one must be what self-interest dictates – good or bad, wise or foolish, serious or ridiculous, virtuous or vicious...When I say vicious,; it is by way of speaking your language, for if we came to a clear understanding it might turn out that what you call vice I call virtue, and that what I call vice you call virtue, Diderot (1966) pages 83-4.

Usually greatness of character comes from a natural balance between several opposing qualities, page 94.

Diderot's (1966) social satire, the Platonic-style dialogue *Reameau's Nephew*, has attracted much comment, most notably from Hegel. The text aims at establishing truth about pre-revolutionary French society by means of a discussion between a philosopher and Rameau's down and out nephew, who is compared to the Greek ascetic philosopher Diogenes, with an extra voice given to the philosopher, who like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, reflects on the conversation at a later date. The

form suggests the Sophists' philosophical stance which takes truth to be the sum of the partial truths represented by each social vantage point, hence Hegel's admiration for the text. The philosopher's views are a reflection of the dominant morals and mores of French bourgeois society, whereas those of the nephew are at first selfish and decadent. However, as the dialogue develops the nephew begins to expose the contradictions and hypocrisy of the French upper classes, and the philosopher's views begin to seem naïve and ineffectual.

The social contradictions generated by the nephew are revealed in the following passages, which owe much to Rousseau: "he demonstrated as clearly as one and one make two that nothing was more useful to nations than lies and nothing more harmful than truth... That is the final outcome of life in every sphere. At the last day all are equally rich, whether it is Samuel Barnard (a financier to the French King – S.S.) who, thanks to thefts, pillagings and bankruptcies, leaves seven millions in gold, or Rameau who will leave nothing, Rameau whose hessian shroud will be provided by charity... In nature all the species feed on each other, and all classes prey on each other in society. We mete out justice to each other without the law taking a hand... For long ages there was an official King's Jester, but at no time has there been an official King's Wise Man", pages 38, 52, 63 and 83.

Adam Ferguson and the Scottish Enlightenment

18th century Scottish intellectuals, particularly Ferguson, Millar and Smith, enjoyed a degree of intellectual freedom as capitalism overcame the vestiges of feudalism. However, they were aware of the capitalist contradictions, as the Lowlands industrialised, to which Mandeville had drawn attention to south of the border. Mandeville's turning upside down of respectable middle class thinking, by showing that vice leads to virtue and virtue to vice, was a hammer blow to their attempts to develop a new moral philosophy. Ferguson (1966) was obviously talking about Mandeville when he said that there were men who in talking about morals "give loose to ridicule, indignation, and scorn", page 33. Although he displayed the kind of morality mocked by Mandeville, readily indulged his Hellenomania, and knew little of occult dialectics, Ferguson directly confronted the contradictions generated in civil society. In the 18th century Glasgow and Edinburgh were notable for the amount of workshop production, a growing number of factories, and a sharp division of labour. However, Ferguson is famous for noting the contradictions

associated with what came to be known as *alienation*, or as he put the matter “dismemberment of the human character” page 230, caused by an advancing division of labour:

In every commercial state, notwithstanding any pretension to equal rights, the exaltation of a few must depress the many. In this arrangement, we think that the extreme meanness of some classes must arise chiefly from the defect of knowledge, and of liberal education...But we forget how many circumstances, especially in populous cities, tend to corrupt the lowest orders of men. An admiration of wealth unpossessed, becoming a principle of envy, or of servility; a habit of acting perpetually with a view to profit, and under a sense of subjection; the crimes to which they are allured, in order to feed their debauch, or to gratify their avarice, are examples, not of ignorance, but of corruption and baseness...under the disparities of condition, and the unequal cultivation of the mind which attend the variety of pursuits, and applications, that separate mankind in the advanced state of commercial arts, pages 186-7.

The following passage shows that Ferguson is not only disturbed that people come to be judged not by what they are, but by what they possess, but also that he has learned from Mandeville:

We judge of entire nations by the productions of a few mechanical arts, and think we are talking of men, while we are boasting of their estates, their dress, and their palaces. The sense in which we apply the terms, great, and noble, high rank, and high life, shew, that we have, on such occasions, transferred the idea of perfection from the character to the equipage; and that excellence itself is, in our esteem, a mere pageant, adorned at a great expense, by the labours of many workmen, pages 252-3.

Adam Smith and social forces

The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible, Adam Smith highlighting a central contradiction of capitalism, quoted in Lux page 100.

those who labour most get least, Smith in the Early Draft, quoted in Colletti page 156.

Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many, Smith, quoted on page 171 of Colletti.

Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities...It is, as it were, a certain quantity of labour stocked and stored up to be employed, if necessary, upon some other occasion, Adam Smith, quoted in Raphael (1985) pages 63 and 67.

The greatest discovery that was ever made by man, Smith speaking of Newton's laws, quoted in Lux (1990) page 14.

The key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment for our purposes is Adam Smith, who came from an intellectual background, his father being a lawyer and civil servant. At first sight Smith shows no evidence of the use of occult or mystical dialectics, but he was, as we shall see, profoundly affected by Newton's ideas on occult forces. Like his atheist friend Hume, Smith was a secular humanist. An intellectual high flyer in his youth, Smith attended Glasgow University at the age of fourteen before going to Oxford. His influences included Rousseau, the Physiocrats, Lucian's satires and crucially Mandeville, of whose work Smith said that it could not "have occasioned so general an alarm among those who are the friends of better principles, had it not in some respects borrowed upon the truth", quoted in Colletti page 211. Smith struggled with the disturbing effect which Mandeville exerted on his humanism. Whereas Mandeville states the contradiction that vice leads to benefit and sees no need of a resolution, Smith's 'resolution' partly consists of asserting that the vices of lying and cheating are really just the working out of "self-interest". Raphael (1985) explains the problem:

the Moral Sentiments as a whole gives so much prominence to the effect of sympathy in human life. Apart from the 'economic' passage, Smith writes as if sympathy played the major part in binding society together. How, then...can this be reconciled with the view of the Wealth of Nations, which is surely that self-interest is the mainspring of social activity and that benevolence (or sympathy) counts for nothing? This was 'the Adam Smith problem', over which much ink was spilled in the nineteenth century, especially by German scholars, pages 87-8.

Raphael explains that for Smith all 'philosophers or men of speculation', terms which correspond to our *natural* or *social scientist*, "make connections which would not occur to others...make connections between diverse phenomena", page 104. Although he saw it as provisional and likely to be superseded, Smith speaks of Newton's system as "an immense chain of the most important and sublime truths, all closely connected together", quoted on page 111 of Raphael. Similarly his

view of the existence of four stages of human history, though not as original or sophisticated as Rousseau's, is further evidence of Smith's totalising, implicitly dialectical approach to political economy. For example, in the *Early Draft* to the *Wealth of Nations* he says: "In a Civilised Society the poor provide both for themselves and for the enormous luxury of their Superiors. The rent, which goes to support the vanity of the slothful Landlord, is all earned by the industry of the peasant...Among savages, on the contrary, every individual enjoys the whole produce of his own industry. There are among them, no Landlords, no usurers, no tax-gatherers", quoted on page 156 of Colletti. In common with other commentators on the then new and apparently atomistic mode of production, he was apt to speak of individuals living outside of society; yet he understood all too well the web of social relationships in civil society caused by division of labour:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character...than of the beauty or deformity of his own face...Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before, from The Theory of Moral Sentiments, quoted in Raphael page 34. In reality the difference of natural talents in different men is perhaps much less than we are aware of, and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions when grown up to maturity, is not, perhaps, so much the cause as the effect of the division of labour, quoted in Colletti page 155.

One paradox with the legacy of Smith's thought, similar to that of Newton, is its intellectual colonisation by neo-classical economists, most notably by members of *The Adam Smith Institute*. This involves a distortion of Smith's views, by ignoring certain aspects of his system, such as his labour theory of value, in order to present him as merely the advocate of the "self-interest" of the emerging Scottish capitalist class. Whilst Smith does align himself with that class in its struggle against the remnants of feudalism and sees the progressive aspects of laissez-faire capitalism, he is also aware of the destructive manifestations of the bourgeois revolution. *The Wealth of Nations*, particularly its early draft, is full of examples of Smith pointing to the contradictions engendered by the rise of capitalist society and his sympathy with "the poor":

Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all...No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be

themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged...some have great wealth and others nothing, it is necessary that the arm of authority should be continually stretched forth, and permanent laws or regulations made which may ascertain (i.e. secure) the property of the rich from the inroads of the poor...Laws and government may be considered ...as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, quoted in Raphael (1985) pages 2, 58 and 95-6.

Although neither writer used dialectical idioms, Smith, like Ferguson, perceived clearly the contradictions engendered by the division of labour. In the *Wealth of Nations*, he notes the tremendous boost to productivity which results from this division, because in capitalism the common labourers have more wealth and goods than “the most respected and active savage” quoted in Colletti page 157. However, he is also aware of the effect on the worker who “has no occasion to exert his understanding...and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become”, quoted in Raphael page 52. In the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* he repeats the contradiction of capitalism when he says: “So it may very justly be said that the people who cloath the whole world are in rags themselves”, also quoted in Raphael page 52.

It should be noted that Smith wrote an essay on the history of astronomy, in which he praised Newton’s discoveries on gravity. The essay influenced his economic thought, for example he used the term the “invisible hand of Jupiter” in reference to pagan religion. Although his views on “natural price” demonstrate Smith’s tendency to naturalist reductionism, specifically in reducing a social phenomenon to a natural one, his application of Newton’s idea of an occult force to society is profound. In explaining natural price as a centre of gravity for actual market prices, the equilibrium between the effects of supply and demand are implicitly being compared to the stable orbit of a planet due to the simultaneous effect of the centrifugal and centripetal forces explained by Newton. It is worth adding that Smith similarly explains that the struggle over wages, with workers trying to raise them and employers reduce them, tends to towards equilibrium at the level of subsistence or “the lowest which is consistent with humanity”, quoted in Raphael page 57. Raphael himself says: “Of course, it is not the natural price as such which exerts a quasi-gravitational force. The force is that of self-interest in the tension between supply and demand. However, the effect is an equilibrium which, Smith felt, could properly be compared with the equilibrium that the force of gravity can produce for moving bodies”, page 55. Comparing this to Smith’s ideas of an invisible hand and labour commanded, his attempt to differentiate the empirical phenomena of the market

from the hidden, or essential social forces which are the real causes of both equilibrium and change is evident and profound. Although astronomical analogy proved crucial to Marx's formulation of the labour theory of value, and in particular to the so called *transformation problem*, in the hands of neo-classical economists both the physics and the political economy sides of the analogy were debased into a crude mechanistic determinism.

Political economy and 'resolutions' to the contradictions of capital

I owe the public nothing, J.P.Morgan quoted in Lux page 89.

any preoccupation with fairness and justice is uncongenial to a science in which these concepts have no established meaning, George Stigler, quoted in Lux page 161.

The political economists in Church and State are the real high priests of the realm. They have set us the golden calf...Impious, dissatisfied people, say they, you men without property, mob and scum of the earth, with minds born to inferiority and hands made for our service. Why if you are still discontented do you not seek to accumulate wealth and so become respectable like ourselves?, from an early 19th century journal *The Crisis*, quoted in Lux page 51.

As the industrial revolution intensified and the number of urban poor continued to grow, the paternalistic capitalists, led by Whitebread, tried to reintroduce poor relief in 1782. They sought to abolish workhouses and provide a minimum wage, but there was much opposition to the proposed Act from the *laissez-faire* capitalists, and it was defeated and watered down. However, because even this help for "the poor" was seen as excessive by the political economists and the capitalist class, there was much talk of the vice, folly and degeneracy of the "mobs" of urban poor. The Reverend Thomas Malthus, in his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, called for an end to all relief for the poor and tight control over the growth of the working class. As Ricardo pointed out, the squire Malthus adopted a rather different attitude to his own landowning class by supporting the Corn Laws, which maintained their incomes by restricting cheaper imports. These Laws brought into sharp focus the contradictory needs of the landowners and those of the industrial capitalists who wanted cheap food. Malthus also argued that the purchasing power of the middle classes as a whole was the means of resolving the by then well recognised contradiction of capitalism, the crisis of overproduction.

Ricardo, who agreed with Malthus on the need to reduce the rising bill for poor relief, implied the influence of Newton when he argued that it was linked to the current Act like the “principle of gravitation”. He added his influential voice to those of Malthus and others and eventually, in 1834, poor relief was abolished and the workhouses returned. However, far from restraining the growth of the poor, or of the population in general, the abolition of poor relief saw a continued, and increasing, growth in both: between 1700 and 1750 the British population grew by 8%, whereas between 1800 and 1850 it grew by a staggering 100%. Engels’ *Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in the 1840s in Manchester, remains the most graphic description of the filth, pollution and squalor of urban working class life in the period.

After the American Civil War the centre of gravity of world capitalism moved from Britain to the United States. The principle of laissez-faire came into sharp contradiction with the needs of the new American capitalist class, which added to its ranks some famous names who had paradoxically made their fortunes from the Civil War. The class needed capital to build up an adequate infrastructure, in particular a coast to coast railway. The history of the building of the railway, with the aid of a mass of government money, revealed a latent state-capitalism, which reads like a paradigm of the lying and cheating in Mandeville’s *Fable*. It brought to the fore the crucial contradiction of where the capitalist’s self-interest ends and where the state, which mediates the conflicting interests of different classes, decides that criminality begins. Adam Smith had noted that where economies were increasingly dominated by monopolies, their interests were diametrically opposed to those of everyone else, be they consumers, workers, the middle classes, or small businesses.

Most political economists reacted to this state of affairs by ignoring, or apologising for, the contradictions engendered by the power of the monopolies, and the question of what is today euphemistically called “business ethics”. The economists saved their polemics for the growing trade union, and the later co-operative, movements. We may also note in passing that, even today, it is rarely the case that dialectical analysis is applied to trade unions, which are marked by fundamental contradictions. The realisation that total utility, a term equivalent to use-value which became fashionable amongst the political economists, would be increased if income differentials were narrowed, was another contradiction that had to be suppressed. Similarly the “free-rider” contradiction, and other instances of “market failure”, where people would be able to obtain certain

services without paying for them, were pushed into the background. Not surprisingly the fact that much of the wealth of Europe was based on “laundered” money from the slave trade, piracy and colonial practices was yet another contradiction about which most political economists remained silent.

Such analysis sets the stage for Hegel and Marx, both of whom read the work of earlier political economists. The crucial difference between Marx and these writers is that he explicitly used Hegelian dialectics which, as we shall see in the next chapter, was the synthesis of all previous dialectical thought applied to the study of capitalism. According to Marx, it was the only method capable of coping with both the contradictions and complexity of this mode of production. It thus enabled him to sublate, or progress beyond, the work of these political economists, whilst retaining what was valuable in their work, particularly that of Smith and Ricardo.

William Blake’s dark satanic mills

*But most thro’ midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot’s curse
Blasts the new born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.*
From *London*, quoted in Blake (1976) page 12.

Opposition is true friendship, Blake (1976), page 25.

*Do what you will, this life’s a fiction
And is made up of contradiction.*
Blake page 47.

This chapter nears its conclusion with a brief discussion of the dialectics of the 18th century poet William Blake. It is the case that poetry and prose from all parts of the globe is replete with dialectical formulations. Although there are occasional allusions to these in this text, their detailed study is beyond the scope of the work. Blake, who was a marginalised artisan living the life of lower middle class poverty, is important because he used the ideas of the mystics, Kabbalists and alchemists, particularly Paracelsus. His work was heavily influenced by their dialectical methods,

which he employed in his quest to free humanity from its “mind-forg’d manacles”. Despite his frustration that the American and French Revolution exerted little practical effect in Britain, Blake persevered with his sympathy for the masses of capitalism and turned mysticism on its head by suggesting that its end was humanity, not God. Blake’s experiences of the brutal effects of capitalism in London led him to a view which was the antithesis of political economy. In opposition to Malthus, he advocated the fulfilling, rather than denial, of desire, a vision of a world beyond the factory system.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is the dialectical title of one of Blake’s most famous poems, which Kazin in his *Introduction to Blake* (1976) says concerns the attempt to “wed the contraries...Blake’s conception of union and of the infiniteness of union has no physical status. For him infinity is in man’s passions and his will to know; it is a state of being”, page 20. Whatever the reality of his practical politics, the following extracts from the poem show the dialectical mode of Blake’s thought:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy (page 250)...*Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion* (page 253)...*Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav’d the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began the Priesthood* (page 255)...*but my senses discovered the infinite in everything* (page 256).

A note on Fourier’s dialectic

The early 19th century French writer Charles Fourier described a landscape in which factory production had not yet become generalised. His political economy therefore lacked the penetrating insights of Smith, Ricardo and Marx, and his romantic utopian political vision had no means of realisation. However, his ironic commentary on the contradictions of emerging capitalist society was original, and influential on the generation of workers and intellectuals who fought in the revolutions of 1848. Marx and Engels spoke of Fourier’s “remorseless unbearing of the material and moral misery of bourgeois society”, Fourier (1972), page 69.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the explicitly, and implicitly, dialectical thinking of a large number of writers, but has omitted, or only made passing references to, others. Considerations of space have determined that Ricardo, for example, has not been examined in more depth; however, in terms of the discussion of contradiction his views are largely an elaboration of those of Adam Smith.

On the specific content to which the dialectical form is applied, we have seen that several of the writers in this chapter, particularly Rousseau and Mandeville, have, at least implicitly, applied dialectics to society, rather than exclusively to natural processes, as was the case in previous chapters. The complexities of capitalist society were such that more established modes of thought were simply not able to capture the contradictions inherent in this mode of production. The critical remarks of Valla, and others, on formal logic were symptomatic of the final break with medieval thought, and set the scene for Hegel's dialectical system.