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# THE IDEALISM OF GIOVANNI GENTILE




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# THE IDEALISM OF GIOVANNI GENTILE

*by*

ROGER W. HOLMES

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*To*

SIR JOHN ADAMS

*in grateful memory*

". . . of all of the men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best."

*Man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are; and of things that are not, that they are not.*

PROTAGORAS

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ROGER W. HOLMES.

South Hadley, Mass.
June 1, 1937.

# PREFACE

ITALIAN idealism is older by half a century than German idealism. Its birth year is 1730, when Giambattista Vico's *La scienza nuova* was first published. In a period in which Italian thought was dominated by the contemplation of clear and distinct ideas and the deduction of rational systems therefrom, *La scienza nuova* gave voice to the new concept of human knowledge as developing through a self-generative process. Vico described his new science as a history of human ideas according to which the metaphysics of the human mind ought to proceed. He stressed for the first time the subjective activity of the individual as the foundation of logic, of the individual spirit, and of the spirit of a whole people. To use Spaventa's vivid metaphor, Vico was a comet among the naturalists and the mathematicians of the eighteenth century.

But *La scienza nuova* became hidden in Italy, hidden even to Italians. The main current of idealism has accepted as its source the deservedly famous writings of Immanuel Kant. Its movement, from Kant through Schelling and Fichte to Hegel, was reported in Italy by Galluppi, Rosmini, and Gioberti. Pascuali Galluppi (1770–1846) was to Italian idealism what Kant was to the German school, the first critical philosopher. But he had the benefit of Kant's precedence. Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), while a great student and critic of German idealism, was more a Catholic philosopher than an idealist. He interpreted Galluppi as Hegel interpreted Kant, finding once more the concept of Being as a synthesis of the particular of sensation and the universal of intellection. But things human were to him insufficient: "Truth is not the work of human

intelligence, but human intelligence the work of truth," he wrote in *Del principio supremo.* Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852) raised Italian philosophy near the level of the German school. According to Spaventa he was the Fichte and the Schelling and the Hegel of Italian philosophy; the true Giobertian Idea is not Being, it is Creating: it is not the Entity, it is the Spirit.

The later Italian study of German idealism took two distinct directions. A youthful pursuit of Rosmini and Gioberti led Francesco Fiorentino (1834–1884) to an enthusiasm first for Italian and then for German philosophy. The founder of Neo-Kantianism, sometimes called the poet of Italian idealism, he exerted great influence. At this time there began a devoted study of Hegel at the University of Naples. The result was a Neapolitan school of Hegelianism of which Augusto Vera (1813–1885) and Bertrando Spaventa (1817–1883) were the great figures. From this study of Hegel evolved the two contemporary idealistic tendencies in Italy; one through De Sanctis' (1818–1883) studies in literary criticism, and the other through Donato Jaja (1839–1914), a pupil of Spaventa and an outstanding teacher of men. The flower of the former movement is Benedetto Croce's (1866– ) philosophy of the spirit, which has expressed itself chiefly in the fields of aesthetics and the philosophy of history. The flower of the latter is the Actual Idealism [1] of Giovanni Gentile, expressed largely in logic, metaphysics, and the philosophy of the state. Croce and Gentile have long been associated, because they have stood together in defense of idealism, because of Gentile's many contributions to Croce's review, *La Critica,* and because they directed jointly the Laterza publishing house in Bari. Though their roots are in the same Neapolitan Hegelianism and Gentile is slightly the younger man, Gentile is not a

[1] Capitalized here to indicate its technical significance. Capitals will be omitted in the remainder of the book.

disciple of Croce. Croce himself has said, "Our work was the spontaneous consequence of our spontaneous mental development and of the spontaneous agreement of our minds." [2] An historical comparison of the writings of the two men shows both their division of labor in trying to "shake Italy out of the doze of naturalism and positivism and back to idealistic philosophy" and the independence of their thought. Gentile was more influenced by Italian thinkers from Vico through Gioberti and by Hegel than he was by Croce. Their unfortunate break at the time of the Fascist revolution is evidence of their difference.

Giovanni Gentile was born in the Sicilian town of Castelvetrano on the thirtieth of May, 1875.[3] After a study of the classics in the *R. Liceo* at Trapani, he won the opportunity to go to the *R. Scuola normale superiori* at Pisa from 1893 to 1897. These were decisive years. He and his fellows studied philosophy in breathless enthusiasm under the inspired Donato Jaja. Gentile took his degree with a thesis on *Rosmini e Gioberti* which soon made him known as a gifted interpreter of Italian philosophy. There followed works of a similar nature; *La filosofia di Marx* and *Dal Genovesi al Galluppi.* He started teaching in the *R. Liceo* at Campobasso in 1898 and was transferred in 1901 to the *R. Liceo* at Naples. He published in 1900 *L'insegnamento della filosofia nei licei,* a defense of the study of philosophy in the secondary schools. In 1903 he inaugurated a course at the University of Naples with a lecture on *La rinascità dell'idealismo,* wherein he made acknowledgements to his teachers of the past and present and affirmed his new idealism as the enemy of naturalism and the inquiry into

[2] This and the following quotation are taken from the Introduction to Dino Bigongiari's translation of Gentile's *La riforma dell'educazione.* (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1922), p. vii

[3] For much of the material in this biographical sketch the writer is indebted to D'Amato's *Gentile* (Milano, Athena, 1927). See the Gentile bibliography in the Appendix for a more complete list of his writings and for more detailed information regarding the books mentioned.

the essence of the spirit. Here the paths of Croce and Gentile converge. Gentile began a systematic and important study of the contemporary philosophy of Italy for *La Critica,* later published in four volumes under the title *Le origini della filosofia contemporanea in Italia.*

Gentile was chosen in 1907 to fill the chair of the history of philosophy in the University of Palermo. In this year, at the Sixth National Congress of the Federation of Secondary School Teachers, he attained national prominence as the defender of religion in the schools against the attempts of the positivists led by Sig. Salvemini to secularize them. In the next year he published *Scuola e filosofia,* a collection of short writings on educational problems, begun in 1900 with the prophetic *Il concetto scientifico della pedagogia.* At Palermo Gentile interested himself in the relation between religion and philosophy, and the result was his *Il modernismo e i rapporti fra religione e filosofia.* There followed three important volumes of research: *Bernardino Telesio,* republished two years later in *I problemi della scolastica e il pensiero Italiano,* and *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana.* The work on Hegel is extremely significant for actual idealism.

While at Palermo Gentile was entrusted with the teaching of pedagogy at the University. His meditations on educational problems, as a result of this teaching, are responsible for the *Sommario di pedagogia come scienza filosofica,* a masterwork in the idealistic philosophy of education. Gentile's actual idealism first received concrete expression in an article on *L'atto del pensiero come atto puro,* in the *Annuario della Biblioteca filosofica* for 1912. The polemics between Croce and Gentile which followed mark the doctrinal difference between these two men.[4] In 1914 Gentile was called to Pisa to fill Jaja's chair. He inaugurated his course with the significant *L'esperienza pura*

[4] For Gentile's articles see *Saggi critici: seconde serie* (Firenze, Vallecchi, 1926): Croce's two articles are republished in *Conversazioni critichi* (Bari, Laterza, 1927).

*e la realtà storica.* During the period of the World War there appeared three important systematic expressions of actual idealism: *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro, Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere,* and *I fondamenti della filosofia del diritto.* Gentile was an active leader in mind and body in the service of his country during the war. His political writings of that period and immediately after were collected in *Guerra e Fede* and *Dopo la vittoria.* He also published an important historical contribution of *Studi Vichiani.* In 1918 he was called to the faculty of the University of Rome as professor of philosophy and has absented himself from that chair for only twenty months, to assume public office.

From 1920 on Gentile published voluminously as a result of his researches in Italian philosophy and literature. He also published a series of lectures on the philosophy of religion, *Discorsi di religione,* which deserve attention. In the reconstruction period he participated in a heated controversy over *Il problema scolastica del dopoguerra.* After the revolution, in October 1922, Gentile, though at the time not a member of the Fascist Party, was called by Premier Mussolini to head the Ministry of Public Instruction. He held that position until June of 1924, when he was relieved of the work at his own request. His writings as minister are collected in *Fascismo al governo della scuola.* The educational laws of 1922 were the first new and organic ones Italy had had since the Casati Laws of 1859! They have been highly praised and severely condemned, as all good reforms will be. When Gentile left the Ministry he had done his work. The rest could be, and was, left to his followers. Gentile was more a philosopher than a Minister. He made the mistakes that most philosophers would make when given the opportunity to be kings. His errors were not few, but they were the errors of the amateur politician, the sudden changes which stimulate opposition. He was most critically attacked on philosophic grounds by positivists and

Catholics. The noisiest outcry, however, came from those officials whom his introduction of efficient organization had relieved of office and from those students denied entrance to various institutions by a severe but much needed raising of academic standards. Gentile must have been glad to return to his chair of philosophy.

Since 1922 Gentile has been a Senator of the King and a member of the Grand Council, a member of the committee on the reform of the constitution of the state, has headed numerous cultural and educational groups, and is now in charge of the publication of the *Grande Enciclopedia Italiana.* In 1920 he founded his own review, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana;* he was founder of the *Instituto nazionale fascista di cultura,* and edits its organ, *Educazione fascista.* He has published several works on political philosophy, notably *Che cosa è il fascismo, Fascismo e cultura,* and *Origini e dottrina del fascismo.* Among his most recent writings is an important book in the field of aesthetics. He contributes often to current political, educational, and philosophical discussions. Professor H. Wilden Carr said of him, "It is doubtful if there is a more influential teacher in the intellectual world today." [5]



A study of Italian idealism shows two features to be outstanding. In the first place, idealistic tendencies seem to find a natural home in Italian minds. From the time of Vico they have welcomed a type of thinking that has counted the activity of the knowing subject among the contributions to knowledge. An imaginative and artistic people, they seem to prefer the actuality of existence as we interpret it to the bare "givenness" of existence objectively considered. Like the Germans, they

[5] Gentile, *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act.* Trans by H Wilden Carr (Macmillan, London, 1922), p. xix.

are not afraid to question common sense, as the thinker who embraces idealism must do. But unlike most of the Germans, their texts of idealism are characteristically lyrical and poetic, the continuous reiteration more or less elaborated of a simple and full-hearted point of view.

Secondly, actual idealism seems to terminate one of the major developments of the idealistic position. It has been part of Gentile's function to criticize preceding idealisms. He refers most often in his historical criticism of idealism to Kant and Hegel. Though he rejoices in the tradition set by Vico, has been a great scholar of Galluppi and Rosmini and Gioberti, and was strongly influenced by Spaventa, one feels that he found his greatest stimulation in the German idealists. He carries out the idealistic demand for a universal and necessary knowledge with unique rigor, and brings the tendency toward the exclusive reality of the mind to its logical limit by recognizing that any division of reality is a product of the act of thinking and that if we seek certain knowledge of the real we must look toward the act of thinking in its essential unity.

It is these two features that make a study of actual idealism both significant and interesting. One might trace the development of Gentile's idealism from its beginnings in educational thought, through the negative criticism of the *Teoria dello spirito* to the constructive contribution of the *Sistema di logica* and thence to his later political philosophy. But for an understanding of the position this course is unnecessary, for Gentile's philosophic writings, beginning with *La rinascità dell' idealismo* and ascending through *La riforma della dialettica hegeliana* and *L'atto del pensiero come atto puro* to the more systematic works, represents a constant development and continuous realization. There is no retracing of steps or negation of doctrines previously held. The *Sistema di logica* contains the key to all that goes before it and all that follows. Gentile's interpretation of art, religion, science, education, government

and history is probably best studied in writings bearing directly on these subjects. But the validity of this interpretation can be studied only in the philosophic judgments, the logic and the epistemology and the metaphysics, which underlie it. These judgments and the philosophic system which they constitute are to be found in the *Sistema di logica,* which Gentile has himself characterized as the constructive expression of his philosophy which follows the destructive criticism embodied in the *Teoria dello spirito.*[6]

Therefore this study of actual idealism will concern itself chiefly with an exposition and critical estimate of the doctrines contained in the *Sistema di logica.* To many readers, however, a brief historical and systematic description of actual idealism will be helpful by way of introduction. It may also be profitable to consider in words other than Gentile's the metaphysical and epistemological difficulties with which he finds himself faced and the reasons why the solutions to these difficulties given by philosophers of the past are to him not satisfactory. Hence Part One will describe Gentile's position and restate his argument. For a more detailed account of the destructive aspects of this philosophy the reader may refer to Professor Carr's translation of the *Teoria dello spirito.*

[6] *Sistema di logica:* (Bari, Laterza; Vol. I, 1922; Vol. II, 1923), Vol. II, p. 327.

# CONTENTS


| | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| | PREFACE—HISTORICAL | ix |
| | **PART ONE** | |
| | **INTRODUCTION** | |
| *Chapter One.* | GENTILE'S ACTUAL IDEALISM | 3 |
| *Chapter Two.* | THE ARGUMENT RESTATED | 32 |
| | **PART TWO** | |
| | **THE *SISTEMA DI LOGICA*** | |
| *Chapter Three.* | THE LOGIC OF THE ABSTRACT | 57 |
| *Chapter Four.* | THE LOGIC OF THE CONCRETE | 75 |
| | **PART THREE** | |
| | **THE *SISTEMA DI LOGICA* CRITICALLY CONSIDERED** | |
| *Chapter Five.* | THE PROBLEM | 111 |
| *Chapter Six.* | THE GENTILIAN TERMINOLOGY | 121 |
| *Chapter Seven.* | THE GENTILIAN SYSTEM | 137 |
| *Chapter Eight.* | THE EGOCENTRIC PREDICAMENT | 162 |
| *Chapter Nine.* | FORM AND MATTER | 185 |
| *Chapter Ten.* | THE GENTILIAN METAPHYSICS AND THE MEANINGFUL | 203 |
| | **PART FOUR** | |
| | **CONCLUSION** | |
| *Chapter Eleven.* | THE CONTRIBUTION OF GENTILE | 225 |
| | **APPENDIX** | |
| | A GENTILE BIBLIOGRAPHY | 249 |
| | INDEX | 259 |

# PART ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## Chapter One

# GENTILE'S ACTUAL IDEALISM

Actual idealism is essentially a simple doctrine arising out of an unusually rigorous interpretation of the function of philosophy and a persistent endeavor to discover the consequent nature of truth. Gentile seeks what philosophers have long sought, a universal and necessary knowledge made up of undeniable judgments about the nature of reality. His fundamental point of departure from the philosophies of the past is found in a single criticism which he makes of them all. He seeks to make an accusation out of the recognized fact that in all of them truth and reality are independent of the act of knowing. His accusation is that such truths must lack ultimate verity and that such realities must be abstract. Philosophers before Gentile have been aware of the difficulties involved in building a system from such truths and describing such a reality, but none before have thought these difficulties as great as those involved in a doctrine for which all reality is gathered within the unity of the act of thinking.

So far as Gentile is concerned the movement which has culminated in actual idealism began with Kant. It was Kant who understood so thoroughly the necessity of introducing the activity of the knowing subject as contributory to a strictly philosophic knowledge. But Kant's was only a first step. He left unexplained, and inexplicable within his doctrine, the multiplicities of sensation and of the categories. Whence these multiplicities? They represent one of the clearly recognized difficulties in the Kantian idealism. Like many others, Gentile is unwilling to take

these multiplicities for granted. Furthermore, the Noumenon at the foundation of Kant's doctrine is arrived at by way of a judgment which may at least be described as uncertain. An entity, separated from and therefore objective to the act of knowing, may be guessed at, but can it be known? Finally, whence the distinction between knowledge and action implied by Kant in the separation of pure and practical reasons? This third criticism of Kant is less common than the other two but as old as the *Gorgias* in origin. If knowledge is the only real activity, practical action is rather the outward and visible sign of knowledge than a result of it. Action cannot belie true knowledge: to say that a culprit "knows better" loses meaning. It is this aspect of Gentile's doctrine that gives it the name *actual* idealism.

It is curious that Gentile does not refer more often to Fichte, for of all German philosophers Fichte is most nearly Gentile's spiritual brother. They come at identical points in the histories of their respective countries, preach the same political philosophy, and hold in the same high regard the education given by a nation's schools. They make the same criticism of the Noumenon, and reach out toward the same concept of the dialectic process as the key to necessity and universality in knowledge. For both men the morally free function of self-awareness is a central concept. For both its activity, rather than the influence of independent objects, gives experience. When Gentile characterizes his system as "actual idealism" he should recognize the actualism of the Fichtean philosophy as pioneer work in relation to his own. If there is any truth in generalizations about the doctrines of Fichte and Gentile, it may be said that while Fichte was the discoverer of the dialectic upon which Gentile is enabled to build his logic, he did not attach to it the same ontological significance. He did reduce the multiplicity of Kantian categories to the unity of the creative activity of the Ego, as Gentile also does. But beyond that point the differences begin

to appear. In the first place, for Fichte the dialectic activity always rests in the Ego. This Ego, as creative of the world, seems in Fichte to possess a real existence previous to that creation. We must not at this point define Gentile's Ego, but we may say that for Gentile the Ego must find its existence in the act of creating the real of which it is a part. Fichte begins with a real thinking entity whereas Gentile begins with the act of thinking which must be creative even of that entity. Quite clearly the difficulties which Gentile must face, and which Fichte avoids, are those usually attached to solipsism. In the second place, Fichte is removed from solipsism in that he finds a place in his metaphysics for the Absolute Ego which he calls God, not a personal God but God as the moral order of the world. In the Fichtean philosophy it is this moral order, previous to the act of thinking about it and to every action, which gives moral sanction to the free act. But it is easily seen from what has already been said that this way is not open to Gentile. For him the act of thinking must somehow contain within itself all moral and all truth value. The world order, so characteristic of the Fichtean philosophy as pre-eminently moral, is for Gentile a metaphysical impossibility. We may say that Fichte's motives, rising out of his interpretation of the function of philosophy, are the same as Gentile's, and that the ingredients employed in the dialectic of Fichte are all that Gentile employs. However Gentile carries the metaphysical inquiry beyond either the individual or the Absolute Ego to that ultimate stage of one type of idealistic thinking at which all existence centers around the act of thinking in and for itself and creative of everything which it thinks.

The use which Hegel made of Fichte's doctrine is evidence that Fichte went only part of the way. Hegel interpreted the dialectic as informing us of an Absolute wherein all theses and antitheses are gathered. For Hegel the Absolute is the total thought of the world which the finite thinking of the individual and of the race is ever approaching but which it can never reach.

The Absolute is knowable in the sense that it is the ultimate reality which gives verity to thinking. But in itself it is unknowable because infinite. Gentile's criticism of Hegel is in part similar to his criticism of Kant and Fichte. If the Noumenon and the Ego cannot be known with certainty because separated from the act of thinking, the Absolute is in the same sense unknowable. How can we find ultimate verity for the thinking by which it is initially "known"? The Hegelian metaphysics is productive of the norms of the Hegelian logic, but what are the norms of the logic by which we first arrive at the metaphysics? To Gentile the Absolute is quite as unthinkable philosophically as the world order of Fichte. Mr. C. E. M. Joad puts the issue with great clarity in his *Introduction to Modern Philosophy*. Hegel taught as Fichte did, he says, that thought is a living concrete reality, the only existent of which we have certain knowledge, that from which all interpretations of reality must issue. Gentile finds it incompatible with this that there could be a total concrete unity of thought (the Absolute) which gives intelligibility to individual thinking. Later Hegelians in England and the United States clung to the latter tenet: Gentile holds to the former. And it is out of this former tenet, previously asserted by both Fichte and Hegel but taken in more strict seriousness by Gentile, that Gentile builds his entire actual idealism.

Gentile's relation to the course of German idealism is clear. He starts at the same point at which Fichte did, correcting and furthering the initial attempt of Kant to introduce the activity of the knower among the contributions to certain knowledge. He believes, as Fichte did, that the basis of certain knowledge must somehow be contained within the dialectic of the thinking process. But he does not fear those difficulties which prevented Fichte from arguing that the only philosophic real is the dialectic in act, alone and unattached, and which today continue to prevent a more earnest exploration of the path Gentile has

chosen. It was probably Fichte's recognition of these difficulties that was responsible for the direction taken by the Hegelian school. Hence it is Gentile's position that idealism, defined as that school of thought which attempts to find the material of thinking within the act of thinking, must retrace its steps from Hegel to Fichte and, beginning with the act of thinking, derive from it alone a universal and necessary knowledge. Gentile believes sincerely that this can be done and with profit.

In this return to Fichte and "reform" of Hegel, Croce is in company with Gentile. The history of the relation of these two men's thinking previous to the revolution is given by Croce in his Introduction to *The Reform of Education*: [1]

> . . . Our general conception of philosophy as simply philosophy of the spirit—of the subject, and never of nature, or of the object—has developed a peculiar stress in Gentile, for whom philosophy is above all that point in which every abstraction is overcome and submerged in the concreteness of the act of thought; whereas for me philosophy is essentially methodology of the one real and concrete Thinking—of historical Thinking. So that while he strongly emphasizes unity, I no less energetically insist on the distinction and dialectics of the forms of the spirit as a necessary formation of the methodology of historical judgment. . . .

For both Croce and Gentile only the mind is real. But Croce makes a division of the activity of the mind into Theoretical (intuition and conception) and Practical (economic and ethical) moments. As Mr. Joad says, these articulations of experience are not the result of the mind's reflection upon or deduction about itself, they are assumed or given. They describe the character of experience. We have remarked that Gentile carries the tendency toward the exclusive reality of the mind to its logical limit. Such being the case, even the four-fold division of Croce's

[1] *Op. cit*, p. x. The relation between Croce and Gentile after the advent of Fascism has, unfortunately, been bitter. For Croce's criticism of the *Sistema di logica* see *La Critica* for the 20th of January, 1924. On Gentile's side see the epilogue to the *Sistema di logica* and the *Proemio* in the first number of the *Giornale critico* in 1920.

must go. Any multiplicity, be it that of the mind and something outside of the mind or even a division of the activity of the mind, is arbitrary. As in the case of the Noumenon in the beginning, whence this division? How do we know that there is such a division? Croce can give no answer which is universal and necessary.

We have reached the point beyond which we cannot go. First we lost the Noumenon, then the Ego, and then the Absolute. And now we lose even the activity of the mind in any but its essential unity as *act of thinking*. Obviously we cannot lose the *act of thinking*. Not only is the act of thinking real but it is the only real and is indivisible. Everything else is immanent in it. This is the stuff out of which the web of actual idealism is spun.

*
* *

Actual idealism suffers appreciably from the difficulty encountered in describing it. Its most essential characteristic is that of *activity*. The familiar example of the oak, used to illustrate the Aristotelian doctrine of development, offers a clear parallel. The reality of the oak is the reality of a process of development. It involves various changes of form and of matter which, taken together, give the life history of the tree. At no single point in that history do we have the real oak. The instant yields only a still-life abstraction of the dynamic and changing tree; it misses the essential unity of the whole. The oak is more than the acorn, more than the gnarled old veteran; more than the skeleton holding tenaciously to its withered leaves, more than the green foliage of midsummer. And, similarly, the act of thinking of Gentile, the *pensiero pensante,* is something more than any individual thought once thought, any *pensiero pensato*. The real for Gentile is *the act* of thinking, not a static concept produced by that act.

Many commentators in interpreting actual idealism have

made the mistake of attaching acts of thinking to some entity which might entertain them and thereby give them unity. The unity is there and demands adequate explanation. But it is essential to an understanding of Gentile's doctrine to realize that for him this unity of which we all are aware can be given only by the act of thinking in and for itself. Obviously, in a philosophy for which only thinking is real the empirical individual which is so often invoked is not helpful. The errors into which commentators have fallen demonstrate that it is not so obvious that this unity cannot be given even by a transcendent [2] Ego. Though Gentile does not himself always realize it, the Ego is as indefensible within a doctrine of complete immanentism as the empirical individual or any other entity taken as prior to the act of thinking. Like the empirical individual it is in certain respects a convenient abstraction, but it should not claim metaphysical significance. No matter how extreme it may seem at first, one must constantly remind oneself that over and above the act of thinking in and for itself there is for Gentile nothing that enjoys real existence. Although idealism is usually described as egocentric, we shall see later that Gentile's doctrine is more accurately described as logocentric. The distinction is important. The act of thinking, with its self-contained logical principles, is all that Gentile has to utilize. No concept for which that act is responsible is eligible for metaphysical consideration except to be dismissed as an abstraction. This is the root of the difficulty in describing actual idealism. It is almost impossible to set down Gentile's metaphysics, for even "act of thinking" must be entertained not as a fact but as the act itself in which it is entertained. This idea is no more difficult than that with which we are all familiar which states that happiness is found only in the seeking of it. For Gentile reality, like happiness, is found only in the process which seeks it.

[2] This word, which will appear often in the present study, is used in its literal sense to describe whatever is considered to lie beyond the bounds of the act of thinking. It has no connection with the Kantian meaning.

Another major point which will be helpful at the beginning of any account of actual idealism, though one in seeming contradiction with what has just been said, is that this doctrine is essentially humanistic. This is not to say that human beings as such are of major importance, but rather that human thinking occupies the central position. Actual idealism is humanistic in the sense that the act of thinking as we know it is essentially a human phenomenon. It was the non-humanistic aspect of the philosophies prevalent in Italy at the turn of the century that provided the stimulus for Gentile's work. The Catholic philosophers had placed great emphasis on the transcendent realities of religion, God and moral law. The human had by these men been made subordinate to the superhuman. They were followed by an unusually militant school of positivists, headed by Roberto Ardigò. This second group stressed the importance of nature and natural law. They had subordinated human beings to the external world and its hierarchy of connexities. Gentile has chosen to concern himself with the sense in which God and moral law, and nature and natural law, and any other entities which have in the history of philosophy been taken as ultimate, are themselves the creations of man's thinking. He believes that it is in the progress of man's thinking that God has been given a place in the realm of value, and nature a place in the cosmos. No doctrine could be more thoroughly humanistic than this in which man is creator of the worlds in which he lives. This creation must, of course, obey certain laws. For Gentile these laws come from the very act of thinking itself. That is why the fundamental doctrines are to be found in a *system of logic*. It is Gentile's persistent inquiry into the nature of human thinking that must be studied with the greatest care.

The question foremost in the minds of those who study actual idealism is that of how the various multiplicities with which we are familiar are possible if the only real is the act of thinking in its unity. In a sense this entire study will constitute an at-

tempt to answer that question. It will be best at this point, however, to content ourselves with a bare statement of the status which these multiplicities enjoy in the Gentilian metaphysics. If only the act of thinking is real what description can we find of the individual objects which surround us in a room? Their importance to us is obvious. And what about ourselves as individuals? What is our status? We speak easily of ourselves, scratching our mosquito bites or planning our futures. We usually consider ourselves to be more than mere acts of thinking. Also, what of the laws of nature, which carry on whether we regard them or not? They are not only vitally important but they seem to be essentially independent of our thinking acts. What can Gentile say of all of these things while retaining a doctrine which in its very beginnings denies them metaphysical recognition? Everyone will admit that it would be suicidal for the actual idealist to deny a legitimate and meaningful thinking about the multiplicity of objects which transcend the act of thinking. There are those who on this score dismiss Gentile with the charge that he has been indiscreet enough to bring about his own destruction by his insistence upon a relentless immanentism. A moment's generous consideration will, however, lead in a direction which is probably more fruitful and certainly more reasonable. Gentile is an intelligent man, and no intelligent man is interested in developing a philosophy which is palpably absurd because self-destructive. If Gentile has erred in his thinking he is too competent a thinker to have erred so early. So much for a certain type of criticism.

We shall assume it reasonable to suppose that this too-prompt denial to actual idealism of the possibility of deriving multiplicities may be laid to undue haste in interpreting the meaning intended when it takes a position which appears to be so extreme. Gentile does not mean that there are no objects in our rooms or rooms in our houses, nor that there are not men and women in the world, nor that there are no natural laws. He does not mean

that these things are figments of the imagination. He argues only that the demands of logic limit the conclusions that may be reached in our thinking about these entities and laws, that they may be studied in and for themselves but that such a study will not lead to an understanding of reality. And the understanding of the real is the problem of philosophy. Perhaps the major disagreement between Gentile and those who will not go his way begins right at this point. When Samuel Johnson defied Bishop Berkeley by striking his cane on the pavement he was giving utterance to a demand upon philosophers which most of them feel called upon to respect. Not so Gentile. Most philosophers consider it the function of philosophy to refine, or illuminate, common sense. It is common sense to believe in a pluralistic universe: it is common sense to believe that other men exist: it is common sense to place active reliance on the laws of nature. Most philosophers move away from common sense only to explain it more clearly. Gentile sees in common sense something essentially non-philosophical. He moves away from it in order to deny it significance. Furthermore, most philosophers agree that the study of parts leads to an understanding of the whole, that the study of these multiplicities leads to an understanding of the real even though the multiplicities are not in themselves real. Gentile is in fundamental disagreement with this position. He begins by defining the "real" as the totality of the thinkable, and asserts that the only proper metaphysical study of parts considers them as parts-of-the-whole. Certainly the multiplicities above mentioned are not usually considered in this manner but rather as separately existing objects—otherwise they would not be multiplicities.

Perhaps we may understand this position better by way of a symbolic example. There is a watch on the table before me. It may be considered either in its unity as a timepiece or as a multiplicity of parts. I can emphasize the multiplicity by taking the watch apart and spreading the parts around on the table. I may

now proceed to classify these objects. I may classify them according to material, setting the jewels apart from the metals and then subdividing according to metals. I may classify them in a number of ways according to weight. I may classify them according to function, separating the moving parts from the stationary ones. I may classify the wheels according to the number of cogs in each. I may classify the objects according to shape, moving even into the aesthetic sphere. And so on *ad infinitum*. Suppose I bring a physicist, a chemist, a metallurgist, an artist, and a watchmaker to study these parts. Each acting *in his peculiar function* will make a different study of them. Each of the first four will study them without regard to their function in the whole, will treat them as abstractions. The watchmaker, in contrast, will study them *as parts of a watch;* that is, concretely. Considered in relation to the watchmaker's art the studies of the first four will be partial, each alone unable to account for the watch functioning as a timepiece. Although the contributions of each of the four are of unquestionable importance to the watchmaker they are abstract in the sense that they are *as studies* entirely arbitrary in relation to his work. The assembled watch tells time; neither the physical characteristics, nor the chemical elements, nor the alloys, nor the shapes as shapes tell time.

The parallel should be clear. The parts of the watch correspond to the multiplicities in human experience: the unity of the assembled watch corresponds to the unity of the real. As long as we study multiplicities as such, whether atoms or stars or men or forms or ideas, we are pursuing arts and sciences which are partial and abstract in relation to the more comprehensive study of philosophy. Although these arts and sciences make contributions which are of importance to the philosopher, *the systems* which are developed within them are unimportant because they are arbitrary. Gear ratios and coefficients of friction and tensile strengths and geometrical shapes exist, in the sense that without an understanding of them the watch could not be

built. The parts exist in the same sense. But neither these scientific concepts nor the parts exist, in the sense that none taken by themselves will tell time. The telling of time is to the findings of these four men as the judgments of philosophy are to the findings of the arts and sciences. And the watch itself is to its parts as reality is to the multiplicities with which we are familiar. Gentile chooses to define the real in terms of the unity into which all multiplicities are gathered. According to this definition none of the multiplicities as such may claim real existence. One other point. Surely the watchmaker is not the only one who can tell time. Perhaps he has made the accurate telling of time possible, but he is not the only man who carries a watch. While the philosopher is the man whose function is the study of reality, he is not the only one who thinks about it or acts in terms of it. The thing that the watchmaker alone can do is to build the watch. The thing that the philosopher alone can do is to interpret reality. The point on which the philosopher may insist is that the studies of multiplicities *as such* will never lead to the understanding of reality.

Consider the application of this doctrine to two of the most prominent systems of multiplicities about which we think, human beings and the objects of nature. At first acquaintance with Gentile's doctrine that only the act of thinking exists one is tempted to confine him to the acts of his own thinking, for they are the only ones about which he can know with certainty. How can he know that other men, if there are any, think? The "argument" that he finds all other men like himself in every other respect and that therefore they are like him in respect to thinking is essentially not an argument but a conjecture. Gentile has a more defensible answer than that. He consistently speaks of "acts of thinking of other men" and of "other men" themselves as abstractions. Take, for example, the latter. The problem of what we mean by "other men" began early in philosophy. Do we mean physical objects with certain extensive

characteristics? Do we mean the Idea of man? Do we mean a biological organism which performs certain definite functions? It is not difficult to show that any of these is an abstraction, a concept useful only in a limited number of situations. It is not difficult to show that no matter how persistently we examine the meaning of "other men" we never come upon anything but universals, which have a status only in our thinking. And it is not difficult to show that the entire group of abstractions about "other men" is an abstraction on the level at which men are differentiated from animals, inanimate objects, or Ideas. It is in this sense that "other men" are denied a real existence. They simply cannot be found except in the universals according to which we choose to think them. This is not to say that we must not think about "other men" or their acts, in fact Gentile is among the first to insist that we cannot think without employing these multiplicities. Abstractions are necessary and inescapable. But Gentile insists that if we are to give them significance it must be within a system of concepts that expresses only an arbitrary aspect of that unity of existence into which he gathers all multiplicities when he speaks of the metaphysical.

The same argument holds with reference to the external world. No human experience is more common than that which tells us that we are surrounded by external objects. Nothing is more certain than that it is advisable for us to act in respectful consideration of them and of their laws. Natural scientists have found many ways of studying them. But each studies them according to fixed aspects and each studies them as external objects. It would be futile to disapprove these scientific studies, indeed Gentile does not wish to do so. But it is not futile to limit the scope of their significance. To apply the findings of physics to human beings may be quite inadvisable: the concepts of an exact science may not be applicable to human beings. Whether the object of study is man or the cosmos the principle is the same. The natural scientist is seeking an adequate and practical

conceptual system. It is not difficult to show that no one system, Ptolemaic or Copernican for example, is more right than another. But one will usually be more useful in interpreting past experience for future action. And whatever the conceptual system, it is founded on certain presuppositions or postulates. It is not that Gentile would wave the world of nature out of existence in a practical sense, or even that he would ask us to stop thinking in terms of the concepts of natural science; it is only that by the character of our study of nature it does not qualify as a study of the real, interpreted as he interprets it. The chief difference, perhaps, between actual idealism and the metaphysics which it is endeavoring to replace is that it limits more rigorously the philosophic problem.

We have said that Gentile's study of the metaphysical problem will be essentially a logical one since his real is logocentric. It will be a study of the act of thinking. This we shall investigate in detail later. Suffice it now to describe the major aspects of the logic of thought as Gentile interprets them. Man first developed a logic of contradictories; this is the logic of all abstract systems, whether empirical or rational, and hence called by Gentile the "logic of the abstract." We know the general characteristics of this logic very well. We know, for example, that it is dependent upon initial postulates at both the foundational and the post-foundational levels. We know also that no matter how high the degree of elaboration nothing is developed that was not contained in the initial postulates. We know further that in the employment of the logic of contradictories initial postulates must be accepted without question. These initial postulates transcend the act of thinking in the sense that they lie outside of it and lend it validity. This being the case, it is obvious that Gentile must reject this logic and seek one which shall find the ultimate verity of our thinking within the act of thinking itself. This quest is the quest of actual idealism.

At this point Gentile draws heavily upon the dialectic of

Fichte, for it is in this dialectic and the Hegelian logic for which it is responsible that he finds the answer to his logical, and finally his metaphysical, question. The phrase, "act of thinking," implies mobility and change. To speak simply, that act may be described according to stages each of which is an abstraction because only a partial aspect of the whole. The first stage is the initial act of thinking, the second is the thought which is produced by that act, and the third is the synthesis of the two in the new act of thinking which takes cognizance of what has gone before. An analysis such as this over-simplifies the situation, almost to the point of falsification. Obviously these stages merge into one another. But the progress involved is one, according to Gentile, which our thinking cannot escape; it is the nature of thinking in action. And it suggests an interpretation of human thought and action which is central to actual idealism.

To these stages correspond the major phases of human activity. The first stage is that of self-expression, exemplified in the artistic endeavors of man. All men seek self-expression for its own sake. When Beethoven wrote a piano sonata he was creative for the sake of creation. When my next-door neighbor designs a monogram he is creative to the same end. This is self-expression because it involves nothing foreign to the pure act of thinking and assumes nothing foreign to that act. The activity takes place because it is desirable in and for itself as an aesthetic achievement. But artistry as such ceases to exist as soon as the expression is complete. The Beethoven sonata as it appears on paper, in the hands of the publisher let us say, ceases to be art. Art is alive. To the publisher the sonata is ink marks on paper, a dead thing. It exists once more in the re-creation of the pianist, whose interpretation literally creates it anew. And the listener if he is a good one also becomes active artistically. The sound waves (an abstraction!) possess only as much aesthetic value as the listener gives them. Appreciation is

limited both by the ability of the musician and by the ability of the listener. "Beauty" is illusive because an abstraction. All artists seek it, but discover that they possess it in the moment of creation only to lose it with the completion of their work. Beauty is an experience, not an eternal object; but only one aspect of human experience. Indeed to speak of artistic activity alone is to speak of an abstraction. No man is pure artist and nothing more. For one thing, he must work in some objective medium, however fleeting, and learn to accept its limitations. For another, he must live with his fellow men. The artist who seeks absolutely free self-expression can never find it, nor should he. Life is more than art, and the judgments of life involve more than purely aesthetic considerations. The man who seeks only self-expression may be simply ineffectual, like Shelley's angel, or he may be a nuisance. He is leading a life built around a barren concept. We tend either to ignore him or distrust him. His concept is barren, and it may be perilous. The great artist is great because he is more than an artist, because he has learned the function of art in the larger realm of human activity of which art is only a part.

The artist must work in a medium: art must produce something objective. This suggests the second stage in the dialectic of thinking. The act of thinking is essentially an act which thinks something. It is productive. Thought, when completed, becomes object and ceases to be act. There are a number of important systems of thought produced by the act of thinking. Gentile is concerned chiefly with two of these, religion and science. Religion is created by man in answer to problems of conduct. The man leading the good life is one who has gone outside of himself, who recognizes values which transcend his individual desires. God has often been invoked as a symbol of creation or of omnipotence, but He is also a symbol of a moral order. The attitude of prayer conveys eloquently the meaning which religion has for Gentile. The man or woman kneeling in

prayer is bowed before something not himself which makes for righteousness, is expressing the smallness of the individual before the vast world of human beings that are and that are yet to be. The man who leads the good life is the man who sees beyond himself and beyond the present moment toward moral values which lead far away from the "here and now." Religion nourishes the attainment of this perspective.

Natural science is created by man in answer to practical problems involved in the manipulation of his environment. Whether he builds a fire or a suspension bridge he finds aid in scientific knowledge. The scientist also is a man who has succeeded in getting outside of himself as an individual, a man who recognizes laws of cause and effect which ignore his individual desires. Like the religious man, the scientist is essentially disinterested and impersonal. Galileo dropping his weights from the Leaning Tower of Pisa is typical of the scientific attitude. The man performing an experiment in the laboratory is expressing the smallness of the individual before the vast world of nature which surrounds and compels him. He is trying to find out what he must do if he wishes to control his environment. He may also be seeking knowledge for its own sake in his field. At least these seem to be his functions, if we think of him alone and disregard his part in the whole. But we must not think so narrowly either of him or of the religious man.

Religion and science, too, tend to emphasize barren and perilous abstractions. God and the moral order are concepts, important to conduct and necessary as postulates, but given significance by the thinking in which they are produced rather than giving it significance. Nature is also a concept, one which has undergone many alterations since the early Hylozoists. We cannot think of God or of nature without thinking something which our own act of thinking has created. Gentile says very often that either of the two regarded as independent of our thinking is unthinkable. Both religion and science when per-

suaded that they are seeking entities which transcend human thinking become static and overbearing. They are too ready to come forward with the metaphysical "truth" about morality and nature. There is no such truth, because the concepts they employ, for all that they may seem to be so, are not metaphysical ones. We must continually move toward new concepts of the good life and toward a newer understanding of our environment. At no point in the history of either religion or science would it have been wise to call a halt. We must continually rethink our problems of conduct and of practice: human knowledge is never at an end. Hence at no point in either religion or science do we come upon the real.

Neither the artist nor the religious man nor the scientist, when functioning within the limited sphere of his chosen field, can attain harmony in thought or in action. If we distrust the artist absorbed in the aesthetic quest because he is apt not to be either good or practical, we distrust the religious man completely immersed in his rituals because he is apt not to be practical and the scientist who cannot see beyond his laboratory apparatus because he is apt to disregard the fundamental issues of conduct, and both because they have ceased to be creative and expressive of their own individualities. We can all recall examples of these types, limited in their understanding and partial in their judgments. Art and religion and science must each function in company with the other two. The man who has not found adequate self-expression, the man who has not learned the meaning of the good life, the man who has not come to understand his environment—no one of these is fully human according to a harmonious concept of humanity. It is in the light of considerations such as these that one may legitimately speak of actual idealism as a modern form of humanism. In the act of thinking, which is self-expressive, creative of moral, natural, and social laws, and continuously active in the advancement of human understanding, one finds a significant definition

of humanity. It is almost needless to say that Gentile finds in philosophy the fulfillment of these other human activities. It is philosophy that interprets art and religion and the sciences, and finds for each its rightful place in the unity of the whole. Each by itself conflicts with the others; each by itself tells only part of the story. Not only does each need to know the others, but each needs to participate to some extent in the activities of the others.

Gentile often speaks of his doctrine as essentially moral in character. Since there is nothing external to the act of thinking, not even the principle of the dialectic development, that act must create its own morality. And so it does: according to Gentile every man creates himself as a moral being. The freedom upon which this morality is based is obviously a Spinozan freedom, the freedom to act according to the principles of one's own nature, understood in the sense that the act of thinking itself contains the principles according to which it proceeds and is not constrained by demands arising elsewhere. Here again the humanistic emphasis is evident. The good is not something outside of man, to which he must submit himself, but is the progress itself of his own development. The duty of man is to be man, to carry the development of his thinking and his action to the highest possible point. This development, governed by the dialectic, is in itself good. Indeed it is the only good. Man, considered both historically and individually, is constantly improving upon the morality which his thinking has created. The "actualism" of this type of idealism comes out very prominently at this point. Man always acts in accordance with his thinking, and cannot do otherwise. He is no wiser than he acts: greater wisdom would command wiser action. Gentile does not recognize as valid the distinction between theory and practice. If action is suspended it is part of thinking that this should be the case. To use Gentile's own figure, the philosopher does not sit in the second-story window contemplating the hubbub of

his fellow men in the street, he joins his fellow men and acts with them. Hence the often expressed identification of philosophy and politics, when the latter is interpreted in the broadest sense as being the entire sphere of practical activity.

Perhaps the clearest expression of Gentile's doctrine of the relation between human beings is given in his interpretation of society as being *in interiore homine* rather than *inter homines*. Gentile's objection to the eighteenth century concept of democracy is that it involves the abstract concept of man as an individual separate from other individuals. The man who expresses at the polls satisfaction or dissatisfaction as political issues affect him personally is both selfish and narrow. Man in society must overcome his individuality and express a striving for the welfare of the whole. Society exists not for the protection of individual interests but rather to express something of which the individual is only a part. This thing is national character. It appears at that stage in the development of human thinking when man begins to see beyond individual concerns to those that affect a whole people. In accordance with the Vichian tradition language is an important factor here, for the reality of the nation is found in the thinking which is developed, and thinking requires language. Nationality comes from within the citizens of a nation in the sense that it is part of the principle by which each citizen thinks. Differences in thinking are responsible for differences in national cultures. However, though Gentile almost always speaks in terms of the nation, there seems to be nothing in the dialectic principle which he describes which could limit this development to that level. The Gentilian dialectic moves by contrasts: if all nations but one were wiped from the face of the earth that one would cease to be a nation. It is not difficult to imagine the internationalism that may arise in the West in opposition to the East, or the more complete internationalism that would appear if Mr. Wells' Martians should invade the earth. Internationalism can never be built out of the

selfish and narrow desire to save one's own life and property. Nor should internationalism destroy the nation any more than the nation should destroy the individual; only out of a fully realized nationalism can internationalism arise. The very logic of our thinking demands it.

Gentile's identification with Fascism is responsible for an understandable misinterpretation of his political philosophy. The state is not for him a reality external to the individual in which the individual completely loses his identity. Such a concept is as abstract as the opposing one of the individual as the sole reality. "Individual" and "state" are ways of thinking. The state is *in interiore homine:* it is the ethical substance of human beings. The state by its nature depends upon authority and force, but is interested in neither for its own sake. Authority and force must ultimately come from the individuals who compose the state. The state is founded on the concept of discipline, which is essential to the Gentilian dialectic. We are familiar with many aspects of that discipline of the individual which gives greater freedom rather than less. The discipline of a foreign language gives the freedom to explore the literature of that language; the discipline of temperance frees us from slavery to alcohol. The schoolboy who demands his "freedom" to stay away from school, and the imbiber who demands his "freedom" to indulge intemperately, are both demanding an abstract and unreal freedom. This is the discipline, based upon authority and force, for which the Gentilian state stands. It is discipline not for its own sake, but for the sake of a super-individual spirituality,[3] as Gentile calls it, in which the individual partakes. Without it the individual ceases to be real; without the individual it is empty.

[3] For want of a better one, the word "spirit" (and hence, here, "spirituality") is employed in this study as a translation of the Italian "spirito." In some translations "mind" is used, but "mind" carries a connotation of intellectualism that seems foreign to Gentile's doctrine. The Italian "spirito" and the German "Geist" are very similar, and convey a meaning for which there is no adequate English equivalent.

Nothing is more basic to actual idealism than the dual character here expressed. The individual is opposed to the state, and each in itself is an empty abstraction. Liberty is opposed to law, and each requires the other in order to achieve real significance. Morality and right are similarly opposed and similar in their mutual dependence. Behind it all is the ancient problem of particulars and universals, which for Gentile are equally abstract and equally empty as interpretations of reality. They are abstract and empty because once thought they are given, on the one hand by realists and on the other by nominalists, a status more fundamental than the thinking by which they are entertained. Nothing once thought, objectified and therefore static, can be real. The real is act, the act of thinking. A final illustration of this may be found in the Gentilian doctrine of good and evil. There are no eternal virtues toward which man is striving, and no deadly sins which he must seek to avoid. Morality is not as clean-cut or as easy as that. We are constantly improving our moral insight; at no point may we call a halt. It is this improvement, this continuous widening of the horizon of understanding, that is the good. We cannot devise equations of pleasure and pain: we can reach no final judgments about eternal verities. Truth is dynamic; it is constantly being made. And today's truth is tomorrow's error. Similarly, both in the history of the race and in the history of the individual, today's good is tomorrow's evil. The only truth is the striving for truth; and the only good is striving for good. Good and evil are closely linked. The man who is not tempted cannot be good, just as the man who knows no fear cannot be courageous. Goodness involves the presence rather than the absence of evil. We shall find the application to logic of this general principle of duality most important.

The implications of actual idealism for a philosophy of history are quite clear. With so dynamic a reality, one in which today's truth is tomorrow's error and today's virtue tomorrow's

vice, the very facts of history cease to be important *as such.* The real history is the thinking of the historian in action. Once written history becomes dead fact, caught up again in the vitality of the real only as part of the thinking of the historian who follows. Gentile uses with great fondness the example of Plato to illustrate this point. The Plato we know is our own creation. He is the man we come to know when we read his works and read about him. We do not know him as a fact in the past, we know him as a man and a philosopher. Was he born in 428 B.C.? There is an historical fact, but in itself entirely devoid of significance. It is a typical abstraction. We are apt to forget that we can never know Plato directly. Whether we know him through the medium of the ancient Greek or through a modern commentator, we are always dependent upon an interpretation. For example, the *Timaeus* even when read in the original is a very different thing to Mr. Whitehead from what it was to Jowett. The difference between the Plato of the Middle Ages and the Plato of the twentieth century is even more apparent. Each is limited by the ideology of its time. Even the Plato of his contemporaries was limited. One has only to consider varying first-hand judgments about the same person today to understand this. The Plato we know is our creation. He is one man when we first read *The Republic:* he is another when we have read all of the dialogues. He is one man to the sophomore: he is another to the graduate student a few years later. He is present only in the act of thinking, and he changes with the development of our thinking.

And so with all history. It is not the bare record of objective and indisputable facts: to treat it in this way is to lose its significance in a barren and static chronological system. Consider the "bare facts" of the history of modern Europe. There are so many of them that no historian ever records them all. He makes a selection, and his selection is in terms of what he thinks important. In other words, he is interpreting. We are de-

pendent for all of the history we know upon the interpretations of the historians who have preceded us. A French and a German history of modern Europe are quite different. It is not even conceivable that someone might write a "history" which would contain all of the facts about the rise of modern Europe, a "history" which would be objectively correct. No man can live for a thousand years and see everything that happens at first hand. If he did, he would be seeing through his own mind and no two minds ever see quite alike. Furthermore, he would be dependent on his interpretation of the two thousand years that had gone before for what he saw. And how would he choose to organize his "history"? What would be his chapter headings? Any organization he chose would in itself be an interpretation of the "facts." The reality of history is the reality of historical thinking which is actually going on. The material which comes to us from the historians of the past is only the material of the present act of thinking. The histories of today, with their emphasis on economic factors, are quite different from the histories of yesterday. And what will the histories of tomorrow be like? We flatter ourselves unduly if we think that the historians of the future will not employ interpretations of which we cannot even dream. This concept of history gives a clear understanding of what Gentile means when he says that the act of thinking literally creates the world in which we live, whether it be the nature which surrounds us, the religion wherein we find guidance, or the past of which we usually consider ourselves to be the product. Only in a narrow sense are we the product of the past: the past is far more the product of ourselves.

No description of actual idealism would be complete without some reference to Gentile's philosophy of education. Not only has Gentile exerted a great influence in this field, but it was through his thinking about pedagogical problems that he arrived at actual idealism. The ordinary multiplicity of pupil, teacher, and material to be taught, is of course strenuously avoided.

Education is not absolutely free self-expression, nor preparation for an immortal life, nor training in mental skills and bodily habits; it is the development of the spirit. To study the child as a physical object, or a psycho-physical apparatus, or a soul, or an organism, is to miss the true reality of the child, its act of thinking. No one has seen more clearly than Gentile the dangers in any attempt to study education scientifically. Gentile's concept has much in common with the *Neuhumanismus* of von Humboldt and Herder in its reaction against the *Aufklarungszeit.*

The character of the dialectic is most evident in the study of the educative situation. The teacher is teacher by virtue of an ability to enter the spirit of the child, to understand the thinking of the child in all of the verity it has for that child. The teacher must not separate himself from the child as a superior, intellectual or otherwise, but must meet the child on his own ground and stimulate the development of that child's own thinking. He is not the distributor of pre-digested facts. His authority must be tempered by the spontaneous thinking within the child. And, similarly, the child is pupil by virtue of an ability to enter the mind of the teacher, to understand the thinking of the teacher in all of its verity. The child must not think of himself as inferior, but recognize his own thinking as true until he himself sees the need for new judgments. In short, pupil and teacher are united in the act of education, which is a spiritual act. Each by himself represents a partial aspect of education, and each considered in himself is an abstraction. Furthermore, the curriculum and the books which it prescribes lack reality. Education is not to be found in books: it is to be found in thinking. The curriculum lacks life until given it by the thinking of pupil and teacher. Are they studying a poem? The poem becomes art when re-created by teacher and pupil in the reading of it; until then it is printing, but not poetry. Are they studying physics? The phrase is unfortunate. There is no physics-in-

itself. There is the child's concept of nature and there is the teacher's concept of nature; and the teacher is seeking by a definite logical process to develop the pupil's concept, not simply to hand down preconceived laws. No teaching is less fruitful than that in which the pupil is passive and has poured into him an encyclopedic multiplicity of "knowledges."

It is not difficult to see that in such a concept of the educative process there can be no objective goal. The teacher is seeking to stimulate the thinking of the pupil in whatever direction its principle of action takes it. There is nothing final or absolute about the teacher's knowledge; the teacher exerts authority only in insuring a steady progress according to the dialectic principle. This principle involves, as Gentile interprets it, four stages. The child must be artistic, must be encouraged to self-expression. The child must learn to submit himself to moral principles. The child must learn to submit himself to the impersonality of natural and social law. And, finally, the child must come to an understanding of these phases of his mental development according to a philosophy which shall gather them all into a unity. The discipline of education is based on both the authority of the teacher and the freedom of the child. Both must contribute or there is no education. It is not difficult to see that such an education will emphasize the humanities. The aim is the same as that of the *Neuhumanismus,* a *Bildung zur Humanität.* In a humanistic endeavor of this kind, the things that man has done and thought in the past are most significant. In the study of literature the thoughts of the greatest thinkers are brought again to life; one discourses with and is stimulated by great minds. In history one makes part of one's own thinking the significance of the past as we come to know it and are learning to interpret it. In the arts one learns of the strivings of sensitive artists to express the thinking that is going on within them as they create. In all of the humanities, in short, we learn about man through a study of what he has done and what he has

thought. One begins to understand better what it means to be fully and harmoniously a man. Through the study of man and of the products of his thinking one learns what humanity is. One experiences that fullness and vitality of spirit for which education strives in promoting development. This development is infinite; it leads we know not where, and we must encourage it to proceed as long as it is logically sound. But it is a procedure according to definite stages; and this definiteness must be preserved. That is why the teacher is part of the process. In the philosophy of the act of thinking education finds its meaning in promoting the harmony and fullness of human development. Beyond this harmony and this fullness, indeterminate as it may seem, there is no goal. This is humanism pure and unalloyed.

The dialectic of the spirit is the thread upon which the entire doctrine of actual idealism is strung. We have tried to summarize here the interpretation of the significance of that dialectic which Gentile himself makes. It is entirely possible that at certain points Gentile has gone astray in his interpretation; indeed it has already been suggested that with regard to the issue between nationalism and internationalism he fails to see the implications for the latter. One feels that in most of his political writing his enthusiasm for the new Italy has limited his scope. On the other hand there are many points at which his interpretations are unusually profound. No teacher who is sensitive to the educative situation and his relation to his students will doubt the profundity of Gentile's thoughts in that field. And there is much in Gentile's interpretation of the function of the scientist that would bear emphasis today. But these many questions of the interpretation of the metaphysics of actual idealism are, relative to certain others, of lesser importance in the evaluation of Gentile's philosophy. He may have made errors in the application of his fundamental doctrines; but an investigation into the existence of such errors is probably

of less significance at the moment than a study of the fundamental doctrines themselves.

It is obvious, for example, that if the act of thinking in its essential unity is the only real, that act must be extremely potent metaphysically. A study of the act of thinking will be a study in the field of logic. We have given an introductory account of the fundamental assumptions upon which Gentile builds his doctrine. We must now proceed to a more detailed study of his argument. What are his criteria of "truth"? Employing these criteria, by what argument does he arrive at his characterization of the act of thinking as essentially a dialectic process? Is this argument valid? Furthermore, having portrayed the dialectic of the act, does he legitimately find in it that self-sufficiency of value, both moral value and truth value, that it must contain if it alone is real? The uniqueness of actual idealism is that in it logic and metaphysics are combined. A study of ultimate logical norms involves a study of reality; and a study of reality involves the logic of thinking. Is this combination legitimate? If it is not there is no ground upon which actual idealism can stand. If it is legitimate, the basis of the legitimacy will be found in the *Sistema di logica*. Gentile's argument, like that of any philosopher, is based on assumptions which cannot be questioned except as they may be found unfruitful. Every philosopher must begin with a definition of the real and criteria of truth which may not be doubted except in the light of other definitions and other criteria. In the erection of any system of concepts a beginning must be made somewhere. But given these beginnings, are the arguments by which the philosopher arrives at his doctrine correct? That is, is the doctrine itself without self-contradiction? And, further, does it offer an adequate interpretation of human experience? These are the questions we shall consider.

That actual idealism is fruitful is without question. It has already been shown that its interpretations within the categories

of human life are significant. It ought not to be too much of an anticipation of what is to follow to say at this point that these interpretations are not entirely new. It is the combination of them that is novel. Actual idealism is a modern version of Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things." It is the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" made into "I think, therefore thinking is." It is the immanentism of Spinoza centered around the human act of thinking rather than around God. It is Berkeley's *Esse est percipi* without his theology. It is the dialectic of Fichte made not into a metaphysics of the Absolute but rather into a metaphysics of the active spirit. Gentile makes the same criticism of the older metaphysicians that the neo-positivists are now making. At the same time he makes the same insistence upon the importance of metaphysical studies that the older metaphysicians have always made. He is seeking what probably has not been so persistently sought before, a metaphysics which shall not be subject to the criticism that it is an arbitrary and immediate product of the imagination. He is seeking a real which need not be taken on faith, and at the same time a norm for thinking which shall be an adequate norm and not involve merely the question of expediency. If he is successful he will have done something which has not been done before.

## Chapter Two

## THE ARGUMENT RESTATED

It is probably more true of idealism than of any other contemporary philosophy that the great difficulty in understanding it lies in its divorcement from the tenets of common sense. It is probably also more characteristic of idealism that it rises out of what appear to its adherents to be shortcomings in other doctrines. For these reasons it is necessary that an adequate introduction to actual idealism be composed of two stages. The first stage should be that of negative criticism, in which the difficulties attached to other doctrines are marked and studied. As compared with the second stage this first one is easier in the proportion that criticism is easier than creation. But when the argument leads to so unusual a doctrine as in the case of Gentile, there is good reason to believe that the exposition of this argument will involve equally unusual difficulties. On the way to understanding a philosopher there is no better exercise than that of stating his case in one's own words. This we shall attempt to do, quoting directly from Gentile's writings only when a quotation is particularly apt.

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"The science of logic arises with the distinction between true and false thought; or, more precisely, when one begins to distinguish between thought as fact and thought which has value." [1] The *Sistema di logica* is the study of thought as

[1] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 45.

having value, the study of the true knowledge of *Theaetetus 200E* that is distinguished from true opinion.

It is customary to make a division of the field of logic into noetic and relational logics. The former is taken in part as a study of ultimate values, of theories, criteria, and definitions of truth, etc. It is immediately epistemological and ultimately metaphysical. The latter is the study of thought as structure. The logic of Gentile falls uncompromisingly within the former. The *Sistema di logica* might well be entitled *Sistema di filosofia* or *Sistema della metafisica,* indeed for English readers such an alteration might obviate confusion. Gentile says in several of his most significant passages that he identifies logic and metaphysics. There is a definite sense, however, in which this statement when rendered into English becomes inaccurate. We are accustomed to limit "logic" to the field of thought structure. Hence we shall react negatively to Gentile's statement about logic and metaphysics on the ground that metaphysical considerations are quite irrelevant to the study of logic. It is agreed that when logic and metaphysics are entertained separately, the former becomes an abstraction in the sense that the structure of thought is abstracted from its content. That it is recognized as an abstraction by modern logicians in no way does, nor should it, deter them from the pursuit of their object. But when we find Gentile saying that logic can never be separated from the metaphysical intuition on which from its origin it depends and to which it ought to be attached at all times, it should be realized that he is referring to logic as noetic and not relational. That he does not attach importance to the other, and to us more prevalent, use of "logic" is his loss, and to be understood only by reference to the fact that he is speaking as a metaphysician. His remark cannot accurately be construed as a criticism of relational logic; indeed it does not refer to the relational logician.

It does refer to the noetic logician, and as such will find gen-

eral acquiescence. This is illustrated by Gentile's use of a concept which, in modern philosophy, has so fallen into disuse that when unqualified it is open to serious misinterpretation. The difficulty is due to the fact that great differences of meaning have been attached to it in the history of philosophy. The concept in question is that of the *Logos,* whence directly Gentile derives the meaning which he gives to "logic." According to Burnett the earliest use of *Logos,*[2] to indicate dialectic argument in the sense made familiar by Socrates, is found in Parmenides. There seems to be some question as to whether or not Heraclitus employed it in this sense also, but happily the answer is not relevant to our discussion. For the Stoics the *Logos* was World-Being or primitive power, the purposeful determination of all cosmic processes, a deified World-Ground and World-Mind. Philo and Justin borrowed the word from the Stoics, giving it the meaning of Reason revealed in Christ. If we seek the fundamental common denominator in the employment of the word we find the *Logos* fulfilling the function of that in relation to which thinking is ultimately either true or false. It is the norm of thinking. In such a sense, removed strictly from rational or theological considerations, Gentile uses the concept.

This concept of the *Logos* rests at the very heart of Gentile's thinking. It provides truth value for judgments: hence the derivation of the word "logic." The truth values which it provides are ultimate in a metaphysical sense which makes the *Logos* synonymous with reality. Hence the concept of the *Logos* contains within itself logical and metaphysical elements which it synthesizes in what Gentile terms "philosophy." Relational logic is admittedly not a study of ultimate verities. Foundationally it takes certain postulates as self-evident. It is non-philosophic. Gentile's entire search, in contrast, is philosophic. It seeks the *Logos* which is at the base of noetic logic. Thus there

[2] *Early Greek Philosophy.* (Black, London, 1920, 3rd edit.), p. 173, ftn. 1.

is a sense in which Gentile is quite correct in identifying logic and metaphysics. Logic in itself (i.e. relational) proceeds backward in an infinite regress, finding structure everywhere and certainty and necessity nowhere, unless metaphysics is invoked. Metaphysics in itself cannot tell us the truth about reality, for it does not define "truth." Hence the need for unifying the two. But this unity is neither logic nor metaphysics; it is philosophy. We are investigating neither the logic nor the metaphysics of Gentile, properly speaking, but rather his philosophy.

Gentile, then, is engaged in a study of the metaphysics of truth. We distinguish certain judgments from others by virtue of their being "true." According to Gentile [8] there are three elements which, when gathered in a judgment, make it true. In the first place, a true judgment is distinguished among judgments by the possession of value. True knowledge is not an indiscriminate collection of judgments; it is the valuing of certain judgments at the expense of others. One knows that one possesses truth and one values it as such. Plato points this out in the *Theaetetus*. For example, one only accepts an intricate geometrical proposition as true when one has gone through its proof or accepted it upon authority. In the second place, a true judgment is distinguished from other judgments in that it is necessary. A true judgment is one that could not be thought otherwise than as true. If a judgment can be thought as either true or false it is without significance as an element of knowledge. An affirmation is true by virtue of the fact that it cannot be thought false if prefaced by "I think. . . ." If it could be thought false it would not be so prefaced. One would make a different assertion. In the third place, a true judgment is distinguished from other judgments in that it is universal. It constitutes that knowledge common to all as distinguished from individual opinion. Two knowing subjects in the same situation could not think differently. For example, if it is true for Bishop

[8] *Sistema*. Vol. I, pp. 45–6.

Berkeley that to be is to be perceived, it is true for all men of the same spiritual background that to be is to be perceived. One might be tempted to remove this qualification, but we shall discover that it is precisely the wider sense of universality that Gentile wishes to avoid. It is the difference in spiritual resources that differentiates truths among men. To the man who has never been introduced to the demonstrations of the sphericity of the earth it is *true* that the earth is flat. This truth is universal among men equally ignorant. And it is sharply distinguished from the non-reflective *opinion* of any one of these men regarding the shape of the earth.

Consider a judgment from the *Monadology*. "These Monads are the real atoms of nature and, in a word, the elements of things." As a part of Leibniz's knowledge this is given value, is necessary, and universal. If independent of his knowledge, it would be described as opinion. Indeed the independence of any judgment from active thinking would define it as opinion. As mere opinion it would have no more value than its contrary or its contradictory. Either could as well be entertained. And it would stand on the same level as either a contrary or a contradictory opinion expressed by another individual. But *for Leibniz* it is true and therefore subject to no one of the three vagaries of opinion, lack of necessity, of universality, or of value. Truth seems to attach itself to individual thinking in a sense which will be made more clear when we come to discuss the concept of error. Philosophers have always sought thoughts that are necessarily and universally valued as true; it has been their problem to bring forth such judgments.

The history of philosophy has shown but one way of providing value, necessity, and universality. A separation has always been made between judgments and that about which judgments are made, between the knowing and the known. In other words, and employing the Gentilian concept of the *Logos*, the *Logos* has always been outside of or objective to the judg-

ments made by the individual. Such a *Logos* may be called a *transcendent Logos,* for it transcends the act of thinking. We say that Edinburgh is north of London because these two cities *are* in that geographical relation previous to our thinking about them. The efficacy of such a *Logos* is obvious. If the *Logos* transcends thought it provides a measure of it, a measure in comparison with which thought can be given value, which makes it rather than its contradictory necessary, and against which the judgments of all individuals can be tested. This may well be the case, indeed philosophers have generally been of this opinion. Yet if this is the case, certain consequences must be accepted.[4]

(1) Since the *Logos* transcends the act of thinking, the relation between the two may be described as accidental. The act of thinking is not essential to the *Logos;* nor is the *Logos* essential to the act of thinking. For example, the relation of correspondence would in no way affect the *Logos.*

(2) Hence truth ceases to be a relation between these two terms, for truth value resides in the *Logos* and the *Logos* is independent of thinking. Truth comes to be found entirely within the measure (*Logos*) to which judgments may be considered as in some manner corresponding, and not at all in the act of judging. *So far as truth itself is concerned,* the *Logos* alone is significant.

(3) Thus, in the end, instead of bringing truth value to judgments, the *Logos* stands alone. It is unchanging Truth. The act of thinking must come to it. Truth is fact and in itself has no relation to the act of thinking. It must necessarily be presupposed, as we shall discover. Within a doctrine of a transcendent *Logos* it could not be otherwise.

These consequences explain the presupposed character of the norms basic to those philosophies which have sought the necessity, universality, and value of truth in that which transcends

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 51.

thinking. By the very nature of the case, all doctrines which grant judgments ultimate verity by virtue of a transcendent *Logos* take that *Logos* as previous to all judgments about it. The contradictory assertion (i.e. that some do not presuppose that *Logos*) has only to be entertained to demonstrate that it is untenable, for it contradicts itself in the very process of claiming validity. This separation of knowing and its norm has been considered the *sine qua non* of truth.

So far there is nothing troublesome in the doctrine of the transcendent *Logos*. But advance another step and it may become disturbing. What happens when the truth value of the *Logos* is brought into question? If the *Logos* is presupposed, is there left open a way of discovering whether or not our description of it (which provides the objective standard for the measurement of our judgments) as monistic or pluralistic or anything else, is true? The situation we are describing is unique among problems of norms, as is easily shown by comparing it with the usual one. Consider the official meter in a bureau of standards. How do we know that it is exactly a meter? We know because we define the meter in terms of it. The important thing to note is that we cannot do the same in philosophy without begging the question. We cannot define truth in terms of that which is simply assumed to be true. An assumption is quite different from a truth. Strictly speaking the official meter is not a meter; it is an arbitrary section of platinum. But truth, in contrast, cannot be arbitrary. It must be universal and necessary. Hence the first of the Gentilian conclusions with regard to the philosophic inquiry: [5] *"A truth transcending the subject is neither a truth nor a knowable reality."* It is not a truth because presupposed. As presupposed it is neither universal nor necessary: the variety of *Logos's* presupposed by metaphysicians is legion. No metaphysician is bound to any one of them: by the nature of the

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 65. The second and third conclusions are also taken from this page.

case the choice is arbitrary. They are not knowable because to be known they must offer the possibility (denied by their lack of universality and necessity) of being assigned truth value. That which is presupposed, or assumed, is taken on faith. It is Gentile's position that such is not the nature of the knowledge toward which philosophy aims. If ultimate knowledge is arrived at by insight rather than a mediate process philosophers become merely the rational interpreters of immediate intuition. This is hardly an indefensible interpretation of the function of philosophy, but it does require a somewhat different concept of "truth" than most philosophers employ. At the moment it is simply to be noted that Gentile rejects this interpretation and pursues his inquiries in another direction.

It would not be fair to say that this dependence upon the presupposed, essential to the doctrine of the transcendent *Logos,* has not disturbed thinkers before the time of Gentile. Such attempts as have been made to surmount it have been in the direction of effecting a reconciliation between the transcendence of the *Logos* and the activity of the knowing individual. They have involved the separation of the knowing subject from the object known on the one hand, and on the other the bridging of the gap between the two in the interest of necessity and universality.[6] For example, the Cartesian attempt was in terms of innate ideas. In this case a rational *Logos* was united with an active subject. But in the interest of universality and necessity truth was here made to transcend the act of knowing it. The same bothersome question could be asked. Whence the truth of innate ideas? Be they as self-evident as could be wished they are true simply because taken upon faith. For this reason the seventeenth century rationalism led to dogmatism. Locke's attempt at reconciliation erred on the other side. He relied upon the phenomenal char-

[6] See *Ibid.,* pp. 59–62 for Gentile's argument here.

acter of simple ideas; but Berkeley and Hume showed that this reliance was, empirically speaking, unfounded. And empiricism, by turning its back upon the presupposed, faced scepticism. Kant tried to effect another reconciliation by combining perception (the given or transcendent) and conception (the activity of the knowing subject). Yet he introduced objectivity and the separation of knowing and known, again, in the Noumenon. The modern attempt at reconciliation, that of contemporary empiricism, in terms of two principles of knowledge (intuition and reflection) is no more successful. Either the two principles are separated into a duality or they form a unity, so far as the acquisition of knowledge is concerned. If they are separated into a duality, the reflection which should produce knowledge does not have intuition upon which to build. If they form a unity, reflection becomes resolved into intuition so far as the verity of knowledge is concerned and knowledge is again based upon presuppositions. These attempts to surmount the difficulty found in the doctrine of the transcendent *Logos* have been attempts to bring truth within the knowing individual. Gentile makes the same attempt. But he contends that each of the others has failed for the reason that while the *Logos* was brought within the knowing individual it was nevertheless kept extrinsic to the act of knowing. Hence the second of Gentile's conclusions: *"A truth immanent in the subject but transcending the act of the knowing subject is not truth."* It is not truth for precisely the same reason that a "truth" transcending the subject is not truth.

Even the epistemological relativism of Protagoras involves this difficulty. The reliance placed upon sensation in his doctrine makes Protagoras' man not the true and proper subject of knowledge but in fact one of the objects present to the subject. In other words, Protagoras' man becomes absorbed in a reality which is entirely the object and not at all the subject

of knowledge. Hence Gentile's third conclusion: *"A truth immanent in the subject itself as knowledge, but transcending the actuality of this knowledge in a naturalistic conception of thought, is not truth."* It is not truth, in the case of Protagoras, because it depends logically and metaphysically upon an intuited (or presupposed) doctrine with regard to sensation. If this doctrine is questioned Protagoras' epistemology falls like a house of cards.

In framing a doctrine of truth there is another and much less usual point of attack. If it is found desirable to avoid completely the difficulty involved in a *Logos* transcending either the knowing individual or the act of knowing, relief may be hoped for in a full and complete immanentism. Is it possible to establish an adequate philosophic doctrine which shall regard the *Logos* as born in and developing with the act of knowing? Or will it be found that in avoiding the difficulty we have just been discussing, so extreme an immanentism encounters other and even greater difficulties? It is probably generally agreed among philosophers that the difficulties involved in a full and complete immanentism are greater than those of any doctrine of transcendence. And it is precisely this question that the *Sistema di logica* reopens. It may be said, then, that Gentile commences with this requirement of truth, that it be immanent in the act of knowing. It will be agreed that in so doing he is pursuing his criteria of truth to their logical conclusion. The act of knowing is the final refuge of an immanent *Logos*. What will be the characteristics of the "truth" which it dictates?

Its most obvious characteristic is its purity: it is *a priori* in the Kantian sense.[7] As immanent in the act of knowing it is not determined by anything extrinsic to that act. If it were so determined, that which was extrinsic would become the transcendent *Logos* by which it would be measured. Anything

[7] See *Ibid.*, p. 126.

extrinsic would become the known foreign to the act of knowing, and the act of knowing would be true only in relation to it. But it is precisely this that the doctrine of the immanent *Logos* endeavors to overcome. The only meaning which the known may have for such a doctrine is that it is in itself the act of knowing. In other words, the act of knowing becomes that act by virtue of the fact that it is its own object. This doctrine is admittedly difficult to comprehend. Philosophy has so long held to the principle of transcendence, has so long assumed the separation of the act of knowing and the known, that it is not ready to take this new path or give its vistas serious consideration. For example, we soon become aware that this *a priori* truth does not admit the possibility of verification. If there is nothing extrinsic to the act of knowing, there is nothing against which the judgment given in the act may be verified. The act must be *norma sui.* Gentile asks us to base a philosophic knowledge upon assertions true not because of their relations to entities external to them, but because of their intrinsic and essential nature. Gentile will not admit even a coherence theory of truth, for even that is not *norma sui,* we shall discover. To take an extreme case, Gentile is forced to the position that the affirmation that Edinburgh is north of London may be accepted as true only on the basis of a final assertion *norma sui* of what shall be accepted as true—in its full form, "I think Edinburgh is north of London"—the truth relation being between "I think" and "Edinburgh is north of London." We shall have to examine with the greatest care just what Gentile means by taking such a position.

If the most obvious characteristic of the Gentilian truth is its purity, its outstanding and most surprising characteristic is its morality.[8] The objectivity of truth essential to the doctrine of transcendence excludes moral attribution. If Edin-

[8] See *Ibid.,* p. 110.

burgh is north of London it *is* north of London, we say. Our judgment of the relation seems to be limited by the external facts of the case. Since it is in its factual character that we customarily think of truth, Gentile's description of it as moral is perplexing. But this unusual feature follows immediately from the requirement of immanence with which the Gentilian doctrine commences. If there is nothing transcending the act of thinking, then that act is a free act. According to Gentile, "I think Edinburgh is north of London" has value only if selected by a free choice from among a number of possible assertions about Edinburgh's geographical position in relation to London. It is this free character, in part, that makes it true. If it were transcendently determined it would lose this character because forced upon the thinker by something external to his thinking. Whatever the grounds of an assertion, according to Gentile, it is true because we freely so think it. Contrary to the customary procedure, he selects the free act of thinking rather than the grounds of the assertion as the residence of truth. This alone does not make truth moral; but it does provide the possibility of morality in the act of thinking, for if that act were not free it could in no sense be a moral act. What, then, does make the act of thinking moral?

Consider the situation as customarily described.[9] The distinction between faith and knowledge is considered to be based upon the separation of knowing and known. Faith is the blind judgment of the subject, an immediate judgment. Knowedge is mediate and governed by an image of the transcendent object. The former is the realm of religion: the latter that of the sciences. A reanalysis of this distinction in the light of the argument outlined above has surprising consequences. An examination of that argument shows that in fact judgments about a transcendent object rest upon acts of faith,

[9] For Gentile's account of this and the following material see *Ibid.*, pp. 74–80.

since the basic intuitions are immediate. Hence the "certainty" of traditional metaphysics and of the sciences becomes transformed into faith, for the basic intuitions are rigid dictators of the rationally superimposed structure. In other words our usual distinction between faith and knowledge is false because what we regard as knowledge, metaphysically if not practically, is a product of faith. What we regard as knowledge is workable and useful, but without metaphysical significance. This is not a complete surprise.

But it is a surprise to discover the faith of traditional metaphysics becoming transformed into certainty under Gentile's hand. This transformation is extremely important to actual idealism. The Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* offers a convenient example of the certainty at which Gentile is aiming. We are not here concerned with what Descartes and later critics took to be the metaphysical import of the phrase. That it gives decisive knowledge (in the traditional sense) of the existence of the self is doubtful. Indeed Gentile considers such a transcendent self to be an unreal abstraction, as we shall discover. The proposition is not one of whose truth we are immediately aware as indubitable; if such were the case it would be intuition (or faith, as opposed to certainty) and not knowledge, because immediate. Of such a nature is the famous proposition in the *Symposium* regarding "beauty absolute." But *Cogito ergo sum* is valued as true by a mediate process in which *cogito* and *ergo sum* are unified in the act of thinking which entertains them. The importance of the Cartesian dictum is that the existence of the real *is* the dictum. It is one of the few judgments that does not require the usual form, "I think I think, therefore I am." Its truth is inherent in itself. I think, therefore I (*as thinking*) am. This is a proposition with certainty, because it could not possibly be otherwise. No thought may deny the existence of thinking without being absurd. The important point is that this dictum is at

once a subjective act of thinking and mediate. In the former rôle traditional philosophy would label it as an article of faith: in its latter rôle it would have to be labeled as knowledge. The resultant confusion is apparent as long as faith and certainty are antonyms. But under Gentile it becomes a clear case of certain knowledge, according to a new meaning for "certainty." Hence the transformation of the traditional faith into the certainty of the actual idealist. To put the argument in Gentile's own words, traditional philosophy made an antinomy of faith and certainty while he unites the two in the certainty of the immanent *Logos*. Any true assertion is faith by virtue of the fact that it is a content immanent in the free act of the knowing subject (which is the genuine character of faith): and it is certainty by virtue of the fact that the act of thinking involves mediation (which is the genuine character of certainty).

Hence a fuller meaning for the morality of the Gentilian truth. The certainty of actual idealism stands in contrast to the contingency of the factual. The factual has the character of being already realized; it is what it is. Whatever necessity is attached to it is a necessity of the past. In the present it is contingent; it might have been otherwise. But the Cartesian dictum boasts a certainty given by the necessity of the "ought" which accompanies all thinking. In a very real sense we *ought* to think this dictum true. The relation between the *cogito* and the *ergo sum* is an *a priori* relation. The necessity arises from within thinking itself. In the realm of fact there is no such necessity. The one thing that thought cannot put aside without negating itself is that necessity which is the reality in which it realizes itself. This necessity accompanies all judgments, by virtue of the "I think. . . ." The factual relation between Edinburgh and London might be otherwise; it is necessary only as we ought to think it. The "ought" implies the moral element, and is based on the

Spinozan freedom essential to the act of thinking. Hence the truth is true as a moral act.

In fixing upon the act of thinking, Gentile seems to have found a *Logos* with certain unique characteristics. Thought may be considered in either of two ways; as the object of contemplation (*pensiero pensato*), or as the activity of contemplation (*pensiero pensante*). Gentile employs this distinction with great effectiveness. The former is the material of an act of thinking which has taken place; the latter is the act of thinking itself. The former is transcendent; the latter is immanent. If in our metaphysics we separate the two, the former will always require further explanation. No matter what we are thinking, we cannot attain the certainty of truth by borrowing that certainty from any act of thinking that has already taken place, for *pensiero pensato* is transcendent in relation to *pensiero pensante* (i.e. takes on the character of a presupposition) and according to Gentile's requirements has not that certainty to lend. The two are never separated; there is no thought without thinking, and no thinking without thought. Gentile destroys another antinomy by uniting the two. The point is that the act of thinking requires no further metaphysical explanation; whatever explanation is attempted will itself be an act of thinking. The act of thinking carries its own mediation and its own certainty. Thought is a reality producing itself, a reality *sui generis,* an activity. When considered as a product of activity it becomes cold and passive contemplation, a part of thought abstracted from reality by a mistaken intellectualizing intuition. In short, Gentile seems to have taken one more step than other metaphysicians. They have described a reality divorced from thought in action, while Gentile describes the activity of thinking itself.

The assertion of morality in connection with the Gentilian concept of truth raises the question as to whether he is in fact

concerning himself with truth or with goodness.[10] Its essential freedom certainly brings an element of goodness into the concept. Not only is this element brought in, but it alone is responsible for the possibility of truth value. He seems quite aware of this. For him it provides the solution to Kant's problem of the relation between pure and practical reason. This differentiation was made with regard to an objective reality which was external to thought. Kant thought of man as knowing this reality and then acting in it. But there is a sense in which doing is doing in so far as it is knowing, and knowing is knowing in so far as doing. This sense is particularly clear if we accompany Gentile in considering reality as immanent in thinking, and labelling anything external as an abstraction. Differentiation breeds unity and unification breeds difference; such is the nature of thinking. Either by itself is unintelligible. Previous metaphysical and logical doctrines have been built upon the multiplicity implied in the principle of transcendence. Gentile does not deny this multiplicity as an abstraction, but he lays ontological emphasis upon the unity of the act of thinking. Certainly its unity seems to be the preëminent feature of this act. In this unity the good and the true are brought together. The good is value applied to action. Since the Gentilian truth is action, it is at the same time good. In a doctrine in which the act of thinking is the only reality there can be no real distinction between thinking and doing. And where there is no real distinction between thinking and doing, there can be no real distinction between truth and goodness. All reality is unified in the act of thinking; this unity is one of the vital characteristics of actual idealism.

The final, and perhaps the most important, characteristic of truth is one anticipated by the previous discussion of faith and certainty. Truth is mediate; that is, it is arrived at by a mediate process.[11] If knowledge is to be certain, according

[10] See *Ibid*, Part I, Chapt. VI.

[11] See *Ibid.*, Chapt. IV.

to Gentile's requirements, it must be distinguished from the immediacy of the traditional act of faith. We have seen that if the *Logos* in its metaphysical rôle transcends the act of thinking, it must be presupposed. Presupposition is an immediate act of intuition or faith. It is something "taken for granted." Hence a presupposed reality is a Parmenidean immutible: it is what it is. It is only when Being is released from its abstractness by the introduction of what Gentile calls "Not-Being" that mediation is possible. Gentile goes so far as to say that immediate Being is unthinkable except as an abstraction because *thinking is mediate*. By this he means that when Being becomes known, the process of thinking provides "Not-Being" and thereby introduces that mediation through which we come to knowledge and rise above immediate intuition (faith, in the traditional sense). The difference between the immediate and the mediate is the difference between a hunch and philosophic knowledge. If "I think man is mortal," this is a mediation between "I think" and "man is mortal." The latter element, the object of the act, is Not-Being in relation to the reality of that act. Any assertion with regard to the nature of the real which does not include Not-Being relegates the real to the sphere of entities immediately apprehended (presupposed) and thus ends, epistemologically speaking, by asserting it only as an abstraction. Thus any significant assertion in metaphysics will be a unity of Being and Not-Being. The general point of view is that thinking should not presuppose Being but should labor in the production of it. Which is another way of saying that metaphysical thinking (the doctrine refers, of course, only to thinking about the real) should, with the wisdom of Socrates, begin with the realization of its own ignorance.

The paradoxical language employed by Gentile is made necessary by this concept of the mediacy of truth, for the mediacy is introduced by the synthesis of Being and Not-

Being. We find Gentile saying that thinking is neither Being nor Not-Being, that it is the union of the two. It cannot entertain Not-Being without being; its doubt is its certainty and its negation its affirmation. And it cannot entertain Being without not-being; its certainty is its doubt and its affirmation its negation. This is not simply to say that Being and Not-Being are correlative terms. Such a doctrine is as ancient as the *Theaetetus*. It is rather to say that the assertion of Not-Being requires the real act of thinking and the assertion of Being requires (if Being is not to be presupposed) the Not-Being given by the mediate process of the act of thinking. A later discussion of the doctrine of truth and error will illustrate this. The reality of thinking as the unity of Being and Not-Being is Becoming, which is the category of universal reality understood as thinking, for a reality which is not thinking is immediate. Hence the extreme difficulty contained in the concept of Becoming. We cannot isolate it in order to study it because in doing so we would destroy its mediate character as a thinking process. We know it only as the process by which we attempt to isolate it.

There is another paradox which must be entertained. Truth is generally looked upon as a static and transcendent thing, the very opposite of the developing process which the Gentilian truth has been pictured to be. And there is an interesting sense in which for Gentile truth is eternal, as it is for Spinoza.[12] Gentile warns his readers specifically against the notion that truth as Becoming leads to the view that every thinker should be judged according to the wisdom of his time. The profession of such a doctrine leads back to truths of fact which have no moral value, for when we say that past thinkers should be judged according to the wisdom of their times we mean that we should set their thoughts as facts into the background of the facts of their time. What happens is that in

[12] See *Ibid.*, pp. 94–6.

judging them we relate their judgments to our own, and ours undergo a continuous development. Take the specific case of Gentile. He relates the judgments of his predecessors to the actual idealism (not a static concept) which he finds to be true. He judges them as they have come near or remained far from the central concept of actual idealism, such as he at the time of judging considers it to be. This act of judgment is eternal in the sense that it gathers time within itself. In its rôle of establishing a temporal order in that about which it thinks (the object of thought given historical perspective), the act of thinking is not a part of that which is made temporal. Future and past are gathered into it because it thinks them. It is non-temporal, which is a way of saying that it is eternal. If it were not eternal, if it were part of the object of thought, it would become part of that pure (i.e. unmixed with Not-Being) Being which could ultimately only be entertained immediately. The history of actual idealism is neither the object of thinking nor a succession of facts. It is the very process of thinking: it is Becoming. Hence the paradox in the phrase, "the eternal truth of Becoming"; a paradox, but nevertheless necessary to the expression of Gentile's doctrine. Doctrines such as his thrive on paradoxes, for the reason that the mediate process of thinking which is the central concept is itself paradoxical.

A concept of truth is never fully understood or capable of acceptance unless the contradictory concept, error, has a significant meaning. It is characteristic of the Gentilian concept of error that it lends meaning to its contradictory. It should be evident that Gentile does not take error in the usual sense, as the expression of relations among external entities, ideal or otherwise. Descartes saw but did not carry to its conclusion the idea that an element of volition is necessary to a doctrine of truth, if error is to have meaning. I must have a free choice of judgments if whatever choice I make is to be either

true or erroneous. The argument is similar to that of Kant, that freedom of will is necessary if our acts are to have moral value. If my knowledge judgments were made for me by my participation in a transcendent existence (intellectual, material, or otherwise) it would be meaningless to attach value to them, for they would be immediately what they were without my power to alter them.

Gentile takes the position that error is not positive in the sense that truth is positive.[13] Knowledge if it is knowledge and insofar as it is knowledge is true. Insofar as it is false it is not knowledge. Error is not that ignorance which is a gap in knowing; it is that ignorance which parades as knowledge. It is a knowing which is not knowing. Truth and error are interdependent. Error is necessary to truth in the sense that it gives significance to it. As Gentile expresses it, error is immanent in truth. But this immanence is not to be understood in a static sense. The truth is not true merely because its contradictory is false: to assert this would simply be to chase oneself in circles. Gentile means to say that truth actually contains error within it. A cognition which was perfect, which did not contain the possibility of further learning, would lose its value as knowledge because it would become purely objective, susceptible of being known only by an immediate act of faith. No one has ever had such a cognition. Thus we find the reason why Gentile is able to say that truth simply as opposed to error is in itself error. It is blind dogma. This is precisely the same type of argument as that which interprets Being abstracted from Not-Being as Not-Being in respect to that Being which is Becoming.

The Gentilian doctrine of truth and error is well illustrated by the educative situation. When a child announces the sum of two and three as six, his calculation is error in relation to the truth of the teacher. But it must be remembered that the

[13] See *Ibid.*, pp. 103–6.

answer given by the teacher is not the result of operations which the child is in a position to follow and which, therefore, constitute the child's knowledge. If it were, the child would give the answer desired by the teacher. It is an accurate description of the situation to say that the calculation of the teacher is *for the child* in error in relation to the child's own truth. The diversity between two knowing subjects provided by the educative situation is one of the best examples of the abstract opposition between subject (the knowing) and object (the known) which allows the false separation of truth from error and error from truth. The cleft is not a real one. The error which is usually differentiated from the truth, when gathered into the act of knowing (i.e. when it ceases to be purely objective) ceases to be error because it is no longer given credence. An error cannot be erroneous unless it is mistaken for truth. Hence the distinction between truth and error can arise only between two persons, because one person cannot find his thinking erroneous without correcting it in the very act of finding it erroneous. In other words, one always thinks to the best of one's ability and hence one's thinking is always true until superseded by later thinking. For the individual, error is always in the past. In general, each philosopher in solving the problems of philosophy thinks his solution (call it Solution A) is the true one. If he did not he would be asserting the truth of some other solution (Solution B). Not until the child by an act of his own thinking recognizes the sum of two and three as five does that sum become true for him, no matter how much the teacher may speak of the "truth" of it. As a matter of fact the sum of two and three as five is true for the teacher only because he has by an act of thinking accepted a certain mathematical system. The teacher may appeal to a system agreed upon by mankind but if the child acquires it parrot-fashion he has not learned it. He must build his arithmetic by his own acts of thinking.

There is an important lesson for educators here. Similarly, the philosopher who upholds Solution A upholds it because it is a product of his own thinking and not because someone has taught it to him as one would teach a parrot. He is only in error *to others,* and then only when he comes into contact with men who uphold Solution B (or C or D) and finds a difference of thought to exist. Each of us, to other thinkers, and all other thinkers to each of us, may err in this way. Beyond the error which our thinking contains in the light of what we shall think in the future, this is the only meaning which Gentile finds for error.

It should not be concluded from this that Gentile ignores the other and more customary meaning. He finds this other meaning to be significant, but in another field than that of philosophy. The geometrician who deduces a new proposition falsely is in error. The scientist who makes an induction which his data do not warrant is in error. As we shall see when we discuss his concept of the logic of the abstract, Gentile is far from denying this other significance. But, as we shall also see when we come to discuss his logic of the concrete, he does not consider this significance to be a philosophic one. The customary meaning for error is significant only in the sphere of objects or ideas which transcend the act of thinking, the sphere of abstractions. In the study of the immanent real it is no longer applicable.

One more point. The case of the child in school for whom two plus three equals six illustrates with great clarity the necessity which accompanies our thinking and upon which Gentile builds the argument that thinking is *norma sui.* The reason why that sum is true for the child is that in the light of what he knows *he cannot possibly think otherwise.* That is why he thinks as he does. And nothing else as an answer to that sum will be true for him *until he does think otherwise.* Why does he change? Surely not through caprice. He changes

because (and if) something new enters the horizon of his thinking and literally forces a new understanding of what he already knows. We have all at one time or another experienced events which have caused complete revolutions in our thinking. This change is literally a revolution for the child. Before that moment that child could not possibly think anything about the sum of two and three except that it was six. That was what "the sum of two and three" meant to him. After that moment, for which the teacher should be responsible, the child could not possibly think any longer of the sum of two and three as six. Something has happened. And that something is an act of thinking on the part of the child. We think what we think at any moment because to the best of our ability that is where our thinking leads us. "The best of our ability" is sometimes very poor. We can improve on it by persistent analysis; but the logic by which it proceeds is quite beyond our control. We must think specific thoughts, not because we are automata, but because our thinking is what it is. Make any assertion you wish, out of the wealth of your experience, be it "Two plus three equals five" or "Man is immortal"; you will discover that you are forced to it by an inescapable necessity, the necessity of the "I think. . . ." It will not change until a new act of thinking forces a new assertion upon you. Were your thinking not subject to this necessity you could not make any assertion that would be more than mere opinion; which would mean that you had done no thinking. And that palpably is not the case. One returns again to Gentile's original contention: if there were no thinking there would be nothing. The very assertion that there is no thinking constitutes a complete denial that there is none.

# PART TWO

# THE *SISTEMA DI LOGICA*

## Chapter Three

# THE LOGIC OF THE ABSTRACT

The exposition of the Gentilian logic which follows in this chapter and the next will employ as far as possible a direct and accurate translation of the terminology found in the *Sistema di logica.* Readers unaccustomed to the technicalities of logic should be warned that this material will exceed the requirements of the critical examination which the present study hopes to make. It will constitute a résumé of the major doctrines of the *Sistema di logica.* This résumé is offered for the reason that the *Sistema di logica* is not available in English. Even so summary a treatment may be profitable to students of Gentile who do not read Italian yet desire acquaintance with the details of the doctrines contained in the two volumes. Only the broad outlines of these doctrines, however, are necessary to the pursuit of the problem set by this study.

The reader will immediately be aware of the strenuous application which the material in Part Two demands. One part of the difficulty is due to the fact that these chapters summarize in a few pages what Gentile says in six hundred. However, there is so much repetition in those pages that greater seriousness may be attached to the second aspect of the difficulty, namely Gentile's expression of his doctrines. We have tried to modify this while preserving the original character of Gentile's thinking. Many of the quotations given will demonstrate this to be an almost impossible task. So far we have often paraphrased the argument. But in this chapter and the next we shall try to present the doctrine as nearly as

possible as Gentile presents it himself. The true modification of the difficulty must await the critical discussions of Part Three, wherein we seek the thought behind Gentile's extreme complexity and esotericism of expression.

These two chapters on the logics of the abstract and the concrete present arguments for which only Gentile is answerable. No additional contribution has been made except by way of occasional expository devices. Even where citations and quotations are not indicated the content is taken directly from Gentile's pages. At many points criticisms will suggest themselves strongly to the reader. The criticisms which we shall make are reserved for later chapters, and will be chosen with reference to the general problem of evaluating actual idealism. We hope that they will include all of the essential ones which will occur to the reader.

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"The logic of the abstract is the logic of abstract thought, that is of thought insofar as it is its own object. . . . It renews *within thought* the point of view of Being as pure Being." [1] We have differentiated between *pensiero pensato* (thought as its own object) and *pensiero pensante* (the activity of thinking). An understanding of the system of *pensiero pensato* is essential to an evaluation of Gentile's philosophy. *Pensiero pensato* is termed "abstract" because it is the product of and therefore is separated from the act of thinking; in short, because it is but a part of the whole. Its system gives what Gentile believes to be an adequate account of *pensiero pensato* from the point of view of noetic logic. By a consideration of the nature of abstract thought Gentile is enabled to prepare the way for the construction of his concrete system.

[1] *Sistema.* Vol I, p. 153. "Pure" here means the immediate. Gentile also employs it to signify the *a priori.*

Though this logic is abstract and therefore does not lead to a knowledge of the real, the real being defined as the totality of the thinkable as distinguished from any part of it (as, for example, the object), it is nevertheless essential to a knowledge of the real. Concrete thinking, which is for Gentile the negation of all immediateness (or abstractness), requires the abstract for achievement.[2] This we shall understand more clearly later; it will suffice at this point to render only the skeleton of the argument. Pure Being is an abstraction (i.e. is partial), as we have seen. We have also seen that Not-Being is an abstraction. But the dialectic of the two is concrete (i.e. a unified totality). We cannot achieve this dialectic without the abstract elements which are its material. In other words, the dialectic (concrete thinking) requires an object: [3]

> Fuel is essential to the fire of thought, which consumes it in giving light and heat. . . .
>
> If by dialectic we mean the logic of the *concrete* (i.e. of knowledge, a unity of subject and object), in addition to this dialectic it is necessary to admit a logic of the *abstract* (a step toward this same dialectic) or of thought as the opposing object without which the unity in which concrete thinking resides cannot be actualized.

Hence the importance of the logic of the abstract, whose nature we are about to exposit.[4]

A judgment objectively considered is an identity which is a unity of differences. If I affirm that virtue is knowledge I affirm an identity which unifies the difference between "virtue" and "knowledge." It may be represented by $A=A$, the $A$'s not standing for the same entity, as they would in mathe-

[2] Gentile uses "negation" in this concrete sense to express the absorption of the immediate in the reality of the mediate by a synthetic process, as we shall see. In the logic of the abstract it is used as an antonym to "affirmation."

[3] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 130.

[4] Gentile also calls the logic of the abstract, "organic logic"; and the logic of the concrete, "critical logic." This is similar to the designation of epochs in history as organic and critical.

matics, but rather expressing logical identity. The relation $A=A$ is the principle of thinkability when thought is objectively considered. Neither term ($A$, or $=A$) may be entertained in thought outside of the relation; the relation is the very condition of thought. And neither term may be entertained outside of thought: [5]

> The nucleus . . . of logical thought is the unity of the noun and the verb . . . a unity in which the noun ($A$) is the Being which is because and insofar as thought by means of the verb ($=A$). It cannot be separated from the latter without disappearing from the field of the thinkable.

In other words, Being as the object of thought (abstract Being, *pensiero pensato*) is Being as identical with itself. Hence the fundamental law of the logic of the abstract is the *Principle of Identity.*

There are two ways of considering an affirmation. It is, first, the act of the subject in positing its object, the affirmation by which the knower affirms the known. This is its concrete aspect, *affermazione affermante,* and will be considered later. Secondly, it may be considered proper to the object as designating its structure, an affirmation which concerns itself exclusively with the nature of the object known. The identity of which we are at present speaking is an affirmation of the second type, *affermazione affermata.* This second type of affirmation at once designates structure and negates immediate Being, for it affirms not an $A$ alone but always the relation $A=A$. That it always affirms this relation signifies that whatever is thought is thought mediately and not immediately. We never think immediate Being except to negate it.

This second type of affirmation is a negation in still another sense, which provides the logical value of the affirmation. Pure Being, the abstract noun, could negate nothing. Indeed it

[5] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 155.

could affirm nothing. Thought, in contrast, provides an affirmation such that if its contradictory were affirmed it would not be, and *vice versa*. Hence if $A=A$ is affirmed, the being of $A$ consists as much in its negation of *Not-A* as in its identity with $A$. Thus the fundamental law of the logic of the abstract also has the form of the *Principle of Non-Contradiction,* such that to affirm that $A=A$ is the same as affirming that $A \neq Not\text{-}A$. The major distinction between this and the logic of Aristotle is that in the latter objective truth (i.e. extrinsic in relation to thought) knows nothing of its negatives, whereas for Gentile contradiction is intrinsic to thought: [6]

> He who possesses the truth has the right to repudiate the affirmations of those who contradict him. This right consists not in the incompatibility of the truth and its negation *but in the truth of this incompatability.*

The *Principle of Non-Contradiction* is contained in the *Principle of Identity.*

In addition to negation, opposition must be considered. There are two types of opposition in logic. There is first of all that opposition of identicals (their difference) expressed in $A=A$. "A triangle is a three-sided figure" is an example of such an opposition. It is internal to a simple judgment. It was this opposition that the Eleatics did not appreciate. And secondly, there is the opposition of contradictories, called by Gentile "absolute opposition." In this second opposition one judgment is the negation of another in such a sense that if the one is true the other is not. "A triangle is a three-sided figure," and its contradictory, "A triangle is not a three-sided figure," offer an example of this second type. It is external to a single judgment, but internal to pairs of contradictories. The contradictory negated by every opposition of the first type (i.e. within the identity) is the absolutely opposed. This opposi-

[6] *Ibid*, p. 159. Italics added.

tion is not fully expressed in the *Principle of Non-Contradiction.* If "A triangle is a three-sided figure," the *Principle of Non-Contradiction* only states that "A triangle is not not-a-three-sided figure." We need in addition the statement that a triangle either is a three-sided figure or it is not. Such a statement is provided by the *Principle of Excluded Middle.* Hence the *Principle of Identity* in its fullness contains not only the *Principle of Non-Contradiction* but also the *Principle of Excluded Middle.* The *Principle of Non-Contradiction* tells us that there are not opposed truths; the *Principle of Excluded Middle* tells us that there is a linkage within each pair of contradictories: [7]

> Just as the reason for the distinction between the Principle of Identity and the Principle of Non-Contradiction rests in the difference between affirmation and the negation whence a concept is posited, so the difference between the third principle [Excluded Middle] and the first two consists in the unity which it demonstrates between affirmation and negation and which does not appear in the other two principles inasmuch as they are diverse.

Each judgment as affirmed involves a negation of its contradictory: hence the false has a place in the logic of the abstract as the negativity immanent in the true affirmation.

The derivation of these three laws of thought is an old story to logicians. The circularity in the progress of thought for which they are responsible is no more novel, but it is so significant to Gentile's doctrine that we shall describe it as he describes it. This circularity is due for the most part to the second and third of the principles enunciated above. The *Principle of Non-Contradiction* tells us that every affirmation is also a negation; the *Principle of Excluded Middle* tells us what in particular is negated. Thus when we make a judgment there is in a sense a movement from the affirmation to the negation of its contradictory, and from the negated con-

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 163.

tradictory back to the affirmation. The point is, first, that an affirmation's meaning is not restricted to the Identity alone but includes the other two principles; and secondly, that what the other two principles negate (falsity) itself negates the original Identity (truth). There is no truth without falsity and no falsity without truth; there is no complete separation of the two. Each is part of the meaning of the other: [8]

> Every concept is affirmed insofar as its negation is not, but it is affirmed as the negative of the concept which would be its negative. It is affirmed therefore as the negation of its negation, with a *circularity* which makes a closed system of the concept.

This feature is familiar as exhibited in the structure of such objective systems of thought as geometry or Boolean algebra. In these fields we always end with a detailed statement of that with which we began.[9]

It follows from this, according to Gentile, that it is impossible to conceive of a Being whose essence is not thought itself.[10] The impossibility may be expressed in this form: if the identity $A=A$ were not thought it would be necessary (by the *Principle of Excluded Middle*) to think $A=Not\text{-}A$. But if our judgments were expressed in this latter form, thought as we know it objectively would be completely destroyed.

[8] *Ibid*, p 163.

[9] See the later paragraph on the syllogism. It is neither necessary nor possible to break out of the circle of thought by means of a principle of reason. Leibniz attempted to break out of it in order to establish the real existence of essences by means of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, without realizing that the will of God for the best of all possible worlds is no more a sufficient reason in itself than the activity of the monads whose reality it was intended to explain Kant attempted to break out of the same circle in explaining the connexity of cause and effect by the Analogy of Pure Experience, but this too by its presupposition begged the question. The mistake comes, according to Gentile, in the abstract separation of essence and existence, or of cause and effect Thought is not the subjective affirmation of existence or of effects Thought is concrete because it coincides with reality; it unifies existence and essence, cause and effect. The problem was a true one to both Leibniz and Kant because they both presupposed existence to thought. They separated the two irrevocably; whereas for Gentile they are one and the same. Thought *is* the real, as we shall see.

[10] See the criticism in Chapters VII and VIII of this study.

"A triangle is not a triangle" is meaningless. In other words, if $A=A$ were not necessary, it would be necessary that thought be negated.[11] Either thought stands upon its identity-relation and repulses the contradiction which would annul it; or it abstracts from itself, and establishes, its contradictory (which cannot be entertained in thought except as an identity repulsing *its* contradictory!). Hence Gentile gives the necessity of $A=A$ an ontological significance. His argument is that if Being must be thought according to the identity-relation, it cannot be thought as immediate $A$ for $A=A$ is the contradictory of the negation of thought: [12]

Either Being or thought. Being is the negation of thought, just as thought is the negation of Being.

Gentile means in this passage that *immediate* Being ($A$) is the negation of thought ($A=A$) and *vice versa*. It is for this reason, he argues, that immediate Being must be replaced by mediate Being, or the act of thinking. This concept of mediate Being, however arrived at, marks an important advance in metaphysics. Logic arises, according to Gentile, when we realize that we do not have to choose between immediate Being and thought. Being, as the *mediate* being of thought, receives an entirely new interpretation. And logic contributes to metaphysics.

Consider now the elements of thought-as-object. The analysis of a judgment is rendered possible by the difference immanent in the affirmed identity. This difference is essential to thought, for the difference makes the identity thinkable. To say "A triangle is a triangle" would not be the expression of a thought. It means nothing. Difference is necessary; but a difference involving a synthesis. Unrelated terms (e.g. $A$ or $B$) form an unthinkable and immediate plurality. Even if

[11] This conclusion is characterized by Gentile as "philosophic naturalism," which defines his use of the word "nature."

[12] *Sistema*. Vol. I, p. 165.

we try to ignore the synthesis and think of a term in itself we are nevertheless compelled to submit to the fundamental law of thought. The term enters an identity-relation and hence becomes synthesized. Just as we cannot in Euclidean geometry separate "straight line" and "the shortest distance between two points in a single plane," so neither of the terms of thought can be thought by itself. Each term is bound to the other. Nor can we indulge in an infinite regress of analyses, as might be supposed, making each term a new synthesis. Such a performance would consist in analyzing $A=A$ into $(a=a)=(a=a)$, and so on *ad infinitum*. It must be borne in mind that we think of $A=A$ *insofar as A is a term of the synthesis* and not a synthesis itself. The term "straight line" is such only as it is synthesized predicatively with "is the shortest distance between two points in a single plane" or some other predicative term. In itself it is nothing but words. There is no analysis of this analysis; only the synthesis of the analysis and the analysis of the synthesis.[13] The terms in their duality furnish the determinedness of thought. And they determine thought because they affirm what they affirm and negate the false element.

Hence the judgment is essentially an inviolate whole. Its two terms may be distinguished from one another as noun and verb, but it is necessary to palliate the distinction by adding that this noun and verb, so-called, are not the noun and verb of grammar. The grammatical noun and verb are revealed by an abstract classification of words. The content of a vocabulary or a dictionary is such an analysis or classification. Grammar provides analysis while disregarding synthesis. But we are considering vital thought, which is both analysis and syn-

[13] That is, in the logic of the abstract. An analysis of the analysis attempts to answer a need for thought development which Gentile thinks should be answered by *pensiero pensante* rather than *pensiero pensato* As will be seen more clearly when we come to the logic of the concrete, *pensiero pensato* is simply a synthesis of an analysis, while *pensiero pensante* is a synthesis of that synthesis with "I think. . . ."

thesis. The noun and verb of thought are the noun and verb of living language, not of the dictionary. We call them subject and predicate. In living language there is no subject without its predicate and *vice versa.* The grammar of thought supersedes abstract grammar by recognizing the noun (subject) as the noun of the verb (predicate) and the verb as the verb of the noun. Gentile gives as an example of this supersession the judgment, "God creates." The true noun here is not simply "God," but "God creating"; definitely not, for example, a God such as that of Epicurus. And the "creates" is the "creating of God" and no other. In Gentile's words: [14]

> Judgment is *thought insofar as the synthesis of the two terms whence Being is mediated in its identity with itself.*
>
> The subject is *the term terminated by the synthesis wherein Being is mediated in its identity with itself,* and the predicate is *the terminating term* of the same synthesis.

So much for one aspect of the relation of the terms of judgment.

Their logical function exhibits another significant feature. The functional difference implied above is not merely that between passivity and activity. The activity of the predicate is the source of the two attributes of objective thought, necessity and universality.[15] The necessity and universality of the predicate act upon the contingency and particularity of the subject. Immediate Being, external to thought, is particular. Its being thought consists precisely in its ceasing to be particular and becoming universal. "Straight line" by itself (if such were possible within thought) would be particular. But

[14] *Sistema.* Vol. I, pp 197 and 198.

[15] These two attributes should not be confused with the necessity and universality of truth (concrete) The necessity of abstract thought is its distinction from immediate Being; the necessity of truth is that it cannot be thought otherwise than as true The universality of abstract thought is the predication of the subject: the universality of truth is its value for all thinkers in the same position "Man is mortal" possesses the former necessity and universality: "I think man is mortal" possesses the latter. See Chapters II and IV of this study.

it becomes universal when acted upon by "is the shortest distance between two points in a single plane," because it achieves the predicate belonging to all straight lines.[16] In the same way immediate Being, external to thought, is contingent. "Straight line" in itself may exist and may not exist. In its particularity it may not be entertained in thought. But "straight line" as a term in "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points in a single plane" attains the necessity which is characteristic of knowledge when asserted as truth; that is, as opposed to the contingency of the factual. Being as thought binds thought to itself or, in the language of logic, becomes universal and necessary: [17]

> Since Being as thought is that Being which has nothing external to itself, thinking may not think anything else. [It constitutes a] universality and necessity which are not only relative but absolute, if our critique of the principle of reason is true. Virtue [for example] is universal as thought not only because there is no virtue which is not included in the virtue which is thought nor simply because for this reason it cannot be said that virtue is thought if the judgment wherein it is thought lets any virtue escape, but also because there is nothing (*insofar as one thinks virtue*), not even not-virtue, which exceeds the bounds of Being as thought. Otherwise thought (as *pensiero pensato,* please note) would not be the closed system which we have demonstrated to be essential to it, but would come to be a thought among thoughts, which is absurd.

And we may say the same thing with respect to necessity. The predicate makes the subject necessary. If the subject became fixed in its analytic separation from the predicate it would be neither universal nor necessary nor even thought. The subject as particular and contingent is abstract. As regards particularity, Gentile says: [18]

[16] Even a particular judgment is universal in the sense that a judgment must be universal to be a part of knowledge The Aristotelian particular judgment is barred from the Gentilian logic, because its meaning includes the universal judgment which it negates.

[17] *Sistema.* Vol. I, pp. 200–1.

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 203.

If I say that man is an animal, it is clear that man is particular as man (simple subject) with respect to animal, which includes other animals that are not men. But this man is an abstraction made possible by the analysis of the analysis of the judgment in which man is thought by me as precisely that animal which in his universality includes not only the animality of human beings but animality without reservation, since it is clear that *all* that animality which I can consider common to all animals ought indeed to be included in man, assuming that man is also an animal. Thus the man thought by me by means of such a judgment is a man who, as universality, has all the universality of the predicate whence I think him.

Even simple sensation, the maximum of particularity, is universal as it enters into knowledge.

The forms of judgment outlined by Gentile may quickly be given.[19] From the discussion above it should be clear that Gentile considers a judgment to be in Quality affirmative, negative, and disjunctive; by virtue of the principles of *Identity, Non-Contradiction,* and *Excluded Middle,* respectively. As regards Quantity a judgment is at once universal, particular, and individual. By the *Principle of Excluded Middle* the universal judgment "All men are mortal" excludes the particular judgment "Some men are not mortal," and *vice versa.* According to Gentile these two contradictories form a community which is responsible for the individuality of the former. In Modality a judgment is at once apodictic, problematic, and assertorial. In the same way the necessity of the judgment "All men are mortal" as a part of knowledge negates its contingency. Otherwise the judgment would be a fact and not a thought. The unity of the apodictic and the problematic Gentile calls the *assertorial* nature of the judgment. In each group the third form is the only one which, *relative to its group,* is the "real" or "concrete" form of the judgment having logical value.[20]

[19] For this material see the *Sistema,* Vol. I, Part II, Chapter V.

[20] These words are placed in quotation marks to indicate that although Gentile does employ them in this connection we feel that they should be reserved for exclusive use in the logic of the concrete.

Universality, particularity, apodicity, contingency; each taken by itself is fact and not thought. In thought they are united into individuality and assertion. Of the three groups only the third, and in this only the third form expresses the reality of the judgment in its logical concreteness as the assertion of disjunction and individuality.[21]

It is a significant feature of Gentile's doctrine that it accepts the traditional criticism of the syllogism as a *petitio principii,* yet insists on the importance of incorporating the syllogism into its logical system. Indeed the criticism supports his doctrine, by illustrating that the logic of the abstract is in its very nature circular. Gentile retains the syllogism but reinterprets it. He reduces it from the three-termed judgment of Aristotle to one of two terms.[22] The reduction is made through the *Principle of Excluded Middle,* which is considered the most fundamental of the three principles: [23]

*A* is *A* because it is not *Not-A,* and can only be one of the two: either *A* or *Not-A.*

The fundamental form of the syllogism is disjunctive:

*A* either is *A,* or is *Not-A.*
*A* is not *Not-A.*
Therefore, *A* is *A.*

But this represents the mere possibility of the syllogism. It approaches full expression through the introduction of universality and particularity. In the predicates of the disjunctive form above, replace *A* by U (Universality) and *Not-A* by P (Particularity) and we have the individual syllogism:

[21] Gentile excludes the Kantian forms of judgment under Relation (subsistence, causality, and reciprocity) because they are all founded on the presupposition of an opposition between Being and thought. Under this presupposition the relation between subject and predicate is formulated as a subjective intuition with regard to a transcendent Being (i e transcending the knowing subject) experimented upon in the course of experience with the known Since such a presupposition is eliminated by the Gentilian requirements for a philosophic knowledge, these forms of judgment would not be legitimate in his system

[22] For this material see the *Sistema,* Vol. I, Part II, Chapter VI.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 220–23.

*A* either is U or is P.
*A* is not P.
Therefore, *A* is U.

Either it is true that all men are animals (including Socrates), or it is true that they are not all animals. [i.e. that some are not animals].
It is false that they are not all animals.
Therefore, it is true that all men (including Socrates) are animals.

In the individual form, replace U by N (Necessity) and P by P′ (Possibility) and we have the assertorial syllogism, which combines Quality and Quantity with Modality:

*A* either is N, or is P′.
*A* is not P′.
Therefore, *A* is N.

Either it is true that all men (including Socrates) cannot be thought except as animals, or it is true that they can also be thought not as animals.
It is false that they can also be thought not as animals.
Therefore, it is true that all men (including Socrates) must be thought as animals.

Here is the syllogism in its fullness. The syllogism in this form appears to contain three terms, but by reference to the original disjunctive form it is seen that there are in fact only two. The universality (U) and particularity (P) are united by the *Principle of Excluded Middle;* and the necessity (N) and possibility (P′) by the same principle. To negate the syllogism is to negate the logic of thought objectively considered; for the syllogism has been rewritten in the form of the basic two-term judgment which, it was argued above, could not be negated without negating thought. The syllogism (and therefore the objective judgment) has its limitations, but they are the limitations of *pensiero pensato,* its circularity or identity. We shall consider what Gentile believes to be the only way

of avoiding the closed circle of *pensiero pensato* when we come to the logic of the concrete.

Gentile identifies valid induction with the syllogism.[24] This identification of induction with deduction is familiar to relational logicians. The usual distinction assigned to induction of opening the way to logically new judgments is doubtful. We have described thought as universal, the particular becoming universalized. Even in induction the particular is thought as universal. For example, when we induce from particular instances that man is mortal, either we are proceeding illogically or we are assuming one of two things: (1) that the instances examined are the only instances covered by the induction, or (2) that there is a uniformity in nature which assures us that if the instances examined are of mortal men all future instances will involve mortal men. In either case the particular is universalized. In the second case, in order to universalize we invoke a presupposition. In the first case a complete induction is necessary in order for the resultant universal to be valid. But this is impossible both in time and space, in most cases. We shall arrive nowhere by induction if we think of the particular as the immediate particular of nature. If the particulars of induction were truly particular they could offer no ground for the induced universalizing judgment. As a term of judgment the particular subject is universalized by the predicate. It never stands by itself, but is always the subject of the predicate and therefore universal. This universality we have found to be the fundamental character of deduction, for it is deductive thought that we have been discussing above. Induction necessarily is thought, and as thought it acts according to the principles of the syllogism. If the particular were not universalized by thought there could be no induction. Hence induction no more than deduction breaks the circle of thought.

[24] For this material see the *Sistema,* Vol. I, Part II, Chapter VII.

Gentile correlates with his doctrine the terminology which has been inherited from classical logic.[25] The Gentilian "concept" is objective thought *par excellence*. Thought and language must not be confused. A thought is contained in the unity of its terms. Linguistically a word is an independent element. Logically a word is significant only in its context. Logically, according to Gentile, the whole classical theory of definition, of *genus* and *differentia,* is meaningless. The classical theory of definition depends upon entities external to thought wherein *genus* and *differentia* may reside. But in the Gentilian judgment *genus* (universal) and *differentia* (particular) are united. Only in the syllogism, where the universal is the universal of the particular and the particular is the particular of the universal, do we find a significance for *genus* and *differentia*. But this is quite different from the classical view. For Gentile *genus* and *differentia* do not exist previous to thought, but rather are given by thought. This unification of universal and particular provides a refutation of all nominalism and all realism. Each of these traditional doctrines, unfortunately, seeks the "concept" in the terms of thought rather than in thought itself. All thought, even that of natural science, is conceptual in the Gentilian sense: [26]

> The naturalist does not think immediately of a wolf. . . . He thinks rather of a certain existing animal intuited *hic et nunc* as a natural being, or as given by experience (as he says) insofar as wolf. His concept is, like all concepts, a synthesis of subject and predicate; an *a priori* relation between a term terminated and a term terminating, with that circular movement of thought between the one and the other which is expressed by the syllogism.

But to understand the value of the "concept" we must understand its limits. Everything that is thinkable as the *object* of thought, not only as possible but as real, is conceptual. But

[25] For this material see the *Sistema,* Vol. I, Part II, Chapter VIII.
[26] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 242.

the concept as object lacks important logical values. We must go beyond it.

Even when the separation between immediate Being and thought is once overcome and thinking becomes reality, even then the spiritual act productive of thought and giving it value as truth may be ignored. In order not to ignore it we must recognize *pensiero pensato* as abstract, and turn to the logic of the concrete. But the logic of the abstract must not be belittled: [27]

> Modern logic is . . . preoccupied with the spirit, as the axis around which all reality gyrates. It struggles between the concept of reality as object of the spirit (nature or idea) and the concept of spiritual reality, with a tendency to deny the former in order to affirm the latter. In this it runs the risk of making the latter another copy of nature, as something presupposed to actual thinking! Hence the frequent assertion of many of the most extreme logics that nothing can remain standing in the old logic. But the old logic, purified and systematized . . . remains secure and vital, . . . as the plain material of thinking, to use the Aristotelian terminology. It is a material separated from the form by abstraction, toward which form it aspires and in which alone it finds its reality.

In other words, the logic of the abstract, which is nothing more nor less than a systematization of thought objectively considered, we shall always have with us. It is an infinite universe to which we are bound; it is the chains which fettered Plato's slaves. We cannot think without grinding out a material. The objective consideration of this material as *pensiero pensato* produces the logic of the abstract. But in that this material can neither increase and diminish, nor develop, nor come into being, it is what it is. It cannot enter into that Becoming, that active process, of which we have seen metaphysical value to consist: [28]

> It cannot, if that same spirit which has made it does not unmake it again, as is its habit. Anyone may surprise this habit in its

[27] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 244.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 245.

ingenuousness and free spontaneity in the child, who makes only to destroy. He breaks all the idols in which his fancy is momentarily wrapped. He is eternally dissatisfied with all things which are things, because they are nothing compared with the infinite reality which grows impetuously within him. He will always be turned toward things, and in them be distracted and dissuaded from reflection; for the subject lives in the object which it generates and from which it is nourished, like mythical Kronos who devoured his sons.

Thought as abstract, as object, has of value what the concrete spirit gives it. Hence we now turn to the logic of the concrete.

## Chapter Four

# THE LOGIC OF THE CONCRETE

THINKING may be considered either as the act of thinking (*pensiero pensante*) or as objective thought (*pensiero pensato*). The two are very different. But they are obviously related by the fact that they spring from the same source. They describe the same thinking looked at from different points of view. In thinking, an object is necessary; we always "think about" something. One of the objects of thinking is thought itself. This object is the material of the logic of the abstract, as we have seen. The important thing to note about this situation is that we cannot have thought without thinking, that thought does not precede thinking: [1]

> If thinking is free, as it certainly is, nothing can be admitted outside of it to negate its infinity. Thinking presupposes nothing; but thought definitely presupposes thinking.

When thinking is considered as objective thought, truth is a concept being a judgment, a judgment being a syllogism, and a syllogism being an identity, as we have seen. It does not have movement or development; it is simply demonstrative. But it presupposes the act by which it is produced. And since it is objective in relation to this act it is partial or abstract. It is, for example, the "All men are mortal" abstracted from the concrete "I think all men are mortal." Therefore we shall proceed to examine the act of thinking, *pensiero pensante*, "I think . . ." plus what I think, noting that it has the unique characteristic of presupposing nothing. No matter how far

[1] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 9.

we carry our search for Being, the most basic entity found will be the act of thinking which constitutes the search.

Since *pensiero pensante* is at least as much concerned with the knowing as with the known, extraordinary difficulties appear. The criterion of true thinking must be found in the *act* as distinguished from the *fact* of thinking.[2] The logic of the concrete, based as it is on the act of thinking, cannot explain *any* error or *any* truth. But it can and proceeds to explain *my* error and *my* truth. The opposition between me and my adversary (let us say Plato) is such only according to a concept of the world which is naïve. For my antagonist is *my* antagonist, internal to me and real in me: [3]

. . . Plato is not Ariston's son, who has rested underground for twenty-four centuries, but the living Plato read by me and understood and thought together with those who have interpreted him. He and his commentators arise again and live in the very life of my spirit.

His error, *interpreted as error by me,* is a moment in my spiritual act, overcome in the judgment of which it is the material. The act of judging Plato's doctrine as error is my personal act by which, first that doctrine is given existence for me (and it cannot otherwise be given existence), and secondly that particular error is surmounted (as it must be if it is judged *as error*). This principle of the immanence of error in truth is expanded to apply to all of the acts of the spirit: [4]

In conclusion, our doctrine says to men: "Take care not to transcend yourselves, either in search of truth or in search of fantastic errors. Good and evil are within you. Liberate yourselves!"

Truth is within the act of thinking, for there only is it given its significance as truth.

[2] See again those earlier parts of this study which deal with the abandonment of the transcendent *Logos* and with truth and error.
[3] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 13. [4] *Ibid.*

Metaphysics and logic are here unified, for the truth of the logic of the concrete is provided by the metaphysically ultimate character of the act of thinking. It is for this reason that this logic is termed "concrete," for "concrete" connotes existence. Since the distinction between essence and existence is possible only in a philosophic doctrine in which existence transcends thinking about it, Gentile's immanentism is of such a character that essence and existence are necessarily identified. Gentile defines reality as the "totality of the thinkable," which totality provides a universal and necessary synthesis of all of the elements of experience.[5] And the real act of thinking is all that exists for human beings, because according to the Gentilian requirements we cannot have a true knowledge of anything separated (or abstracted) from that act.

Being a closed system, the logic of the abstract does not provide the motive power to initiate the transition from it to the logic of the concrete. Thinking is described by Gentile as like a point moving in a circle. The moving point is *pensiero pensante* and the circle it generates is *pensiero pensato*. And what is most important, thinking is like a self-moving point. If the motive power were extrinsic the character proper to the logic of the abstract would be destroyed. In other words, if the necessity and universality of the objective judgment were external to the identity-relation, we should no longer have that closed system which is typical of *pensiero pensato*. We should have a system like that of Aristotle, which was criticized in the preceding chapter. It is the nature of thought as object (as it is of the point) to move in a circle: [6]

> Truth for the logic of the abstract pertains not to thinking which intrudes upon its object, but to the object. . . . And in the object this truth cannot be, and is not, an element or term of thought. It is element and co-element, term terminating and terminated,

[5] *Ibid*, Vol I, p 12 See the criticism of this in Chapter IX of this study.
[6] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 16.

synthesis, relation. Not only the point, then, but the point together with its movement generates the circle.

This is precisely the delicate stage which provides the transition. Just as the point is self-moving and generates the circle, so thinking is self-active and generates the identity-relation as its object. The identity-relation *as thought* is given by an *act of thinking*. "Man is mortal" in order to be *pensiero pensato* must first be "I think man is mortal." The whole force of the assertion is contained in the "I think. . . ." In other words, the *Logos* is within thinking. If this were not so, if the *Logos* were external to thinking, we should have neither truth according to the Gentilian requirements nor the circularity which we have found characteristic of thought. The *Logos* must be free reflection: hence the dissolution and overcoming of the abstract: [7]

> For he who speaks of free reflection speaks of subjectivity, that which is no longer *pensiero pensato* but *pensiero pensante*. This is the destiny of what is thought, not to be able to speak of having thinking exclusively to itself, except when it itself becomes thinking.

Otherwise stated, thought as object must be entertained by an act of thinking. It cannot be what it is without this act. And this act is differentiated from objective thought by its subjectivity. The logic of the concrete begins with the realization of the need of the subjective act to the object described in the logic of the abstract.

We may interrogate the voiceless nature of naturalism. But we shall do so without response. Nature (or any immediate Being) is nothing before it enters the identity-relation of thought. Logic commences when nature enters this relation, becomes identical with itself, becomes intelligible as a ground on which man can place his feet, and ceases to be im-

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

penetrable to thought. Gentile's statement of this step is difficult: [8]

. . . Nature, become thought, finally responds to thought and says: "I am nature." . . . It cannot at first respond; "I am thought"; because it has not yet acquired consciousness of the profound transformation of itself produced by its reflection on itself. Its first reflection is nothing but this comparison: *nature=nature, A=A.*

This is the stage in which judgments are made about nature as the object of thought. The point which is being emphasized here is that the subjective element (the "I") is necessary to such judgments because of the fact that if nature (or whatever object of thinking) were purely immediate there would be no thinking and therefore no judgment. Nature is thought, and thought presupposes thinking. Using the "I" (which is rigorously excluded from the position of abstract logic) nature defines itself, becomes judgment, syllogism, system. It mirrors itself in its discourse according to the three principles. If it did not it could not be thought. Hence the object of thinking, no longer a nature impertinent to thinking, becomes the subject of thinking. The $A=A$ becomes $Ego=Ego$: [9]

Thus thinking which is thought can only be the thought of thinking, which thinks itself.

The subjective act of thinking is necessary to the objective thought thought. It is this subjective act that gives it its character as an identity-relation.

With the discovery of the subjective element (the Ego) we are already in the logic of the concrete. $Ego=Ego$ is the concrete form of $A=A$. The latter exists only through the mediation inherent in the thought process, and the thought process as act requires the subjective element: [10]

. . . This relation, which exists insofar as it is mediation or free reflection (that is, Ego), precisely because it is mediation is, so to

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 17. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 19. [10] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

speak, itself and its opposite, mediation and immediateness, Ego and Not-Ego, liberty and mechanism, concrete and abstract logic, in one.

These are other aspects of the subjective and objective elements, recognizable from what has gone before. Without the synthesis of these elements there would be no Ego, for without the object (supplied by the abstract logic) the subject itself would be an abstraction and an immediate entity. The act of thinking taken in itself would be without an object, providing a situation quite as impossible and unreal as that given by the consideration of thought as immediate object by itself. This constitutes the necessity of the logic of the abstract to that of the concrete. It is also the necessity of the latter to the former. The act must have an object; the object requires an act.

This reciprocal necessity introduces an element of progress which belongs solely to the logic of the concrete. With the subjective act it is possible to provide accretions to thought. The act of thinking initially results in a product which becomes the material of a new subjective act, which act in turn becomes the material of a third, and so on. *Pensiero pensato* acts as a mirror in which *pensiero pensante* sees itself and, by virtue of this self-conscious seeing of itself, proceeds to a new act. Every thinker is aware of this progress in his thinking.

In contrast, the logic of the abstract being circular is simply a repetition of itself. For this reason its material is born in our thought as preëxisting to it, preëxisting because we generate it as a concept which is a concept because of its circularity. This feature of the logic of the abstract is highly significant in the history of philosophy. We all, in greater or less degree, depend upon the concept's character of apparent preexistence. Gentile calls it "the desire for the circle" which is rooted deep in the human spirit. *No object of which we can think can be thought otherwise than as an already determined reality.* We strive toward the summit, where The Concept

resides. Plato first gave outstanding expression to this desire in his search for the Good, already existing and waiting to be discovered. But this desire is doomed to disappointment, for that which thought strives to achieve is altered in the achievement of it. We are children grasping at smoke rings. The contradiction involved is that the whole which we seem to desire is already in our possession by virtue of the circularity of the concept. It is overcome when we realize that we actually desire a satisfaction that can never by definition be fulfilled. For the new is always received in exchange for the old. Contrary to the Platonic myth and in accordance with the metaphysical doctrines of those contemporary philosophers who are emphasizing Process, our thinking builds only to destroy.

The abstract logic is overcome by the realization of its abstractness. Scepticism is often the result for those who discover that what in thought we desire to possess is already in our possession (as in geometry) and count the fact a significant epistemological difficulty. Dogmatism is often the result for those who do not recognize a difficulty in this situation. For both, knowledge is limited to the intuiting of the immediate, a circumstance discouraging or otherwise, depending upon one's criteria of truth value. Gentile would conquer both scepticism and dogmatism by capitalizing the activity of the spirit in constructing the object of thought as *its* object, an object through which it gains consciousness of itself: [11]

> . . . in other words, as that object which it thinks. . . . By virtue of thinking, it [the spirit] is thought. It realizes itself as thinking substance, as Descartes said.
>
> Thinking thinks itself; therefore it is self-creation, which is liberty. Hence value and truth. But to think itself, it must think, and to think it must posit itself as object to itself. . . .
>
> Thus man sees himself in a mirror, which itself sees; he sees in his image the eyes with which he sees his image.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 35 and 36.

In these passages the contrast between the logics of the abstract and the concrete is made to appear. In the former the identity between *A* and *A* was emphasized; it gave character to *pensiero pensato*. In the latter the difference between the subjective and objective elements is emphasized, and gives character to *pensiero pensante*.

Why do we not have a closed circle in the logic of the concrete, too? Gentile points out that while abstract thought is objectively determined, concrete thinking is self-determined. The difference is very great. The result of self-determination is the development of the spirit or of culture, a process. Active thinking utilizes each self-determination as the material of a new act productive of a new self-determination. Furthermore, since reality cannot transcend the act of thinking, the ontological distinction between the real and the possible disappears. Possibility as a predicate may be applied to objects in the realm of the abstract (e.g. a phoenix), but it cannot be applied to the act of thinking because the very act of thinking it would be *pensiero pensante* and hence real. The only unreality in our thinking would arise from thoughts that we knew contradicted one another. But this is impossible, because we do not wittingly think contradictory thoughts. They are unreal to my consistent antagonist, but only as gathered into the reality of his thinking. The meaning of the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* is the identity of *esse* and *cogitatio;* it proves nothing with regard to the existence of an entity transcending actual thought. Kant's great discovery was that nothing can be thought except as a determination of the "I think . . ."; hence the Copernican revolution in philosophy.[12]

[12] But even Kant had his Noumenon, which was responsible for the given in sensation And since there was this given, man became an object among Noumenal objects. Philosophy was right back at Protagoras' position Kant's naturalism was a violation of the foundation of idealism (the synthesis *a priori*) since it presupposed its elements.

One of the most significant features of Gentile's doctrine is its identification of the act of thinking with the philosophic concept of "form," and of the object of thinking with the concept of "matter." Idealism is characterized by Gentile as that philosophy which deduces matter from form. Form is the active principle productive of experience; matter is the content of experience. Plato invented reminiscence in order to defeat subjectivism; Aristotle for the same reason reduced the rôle of the subject to an indifferent remirroring of the material of cognition preëxisting to cognition. The great discovery of idealism was the creativity of the subject in knowledge: [13]

> Here is the profound criticism of all materialism; a practical and not a theoretical criticism. For to think the world as matter in its extreme opposition to the spirit which thinks it (but which thinks it nevertheless, energetically, rigorously, and with awareness of doing so) is to see it vanish before one as a material world in order to be resolved without residuum, not into a world thought, but into the act or process of thinking.

Poetry is not material in a book, existing objectively to anyone who opens the book. The reader forgets the material book and all material surroundings; the materiality of the book becomes absorbed in the activity of the subject. The poetry is created in the act of knowing it. It is not black marks on a white page, a set of physical conditions external to the reader. And so with all objects of nature. The mountain is not the same thing to the peasant who lives in its shadow that it is to the mountaineer who climbs to its summit. All is within thought, constructed and developed there, through the energy of thought in action. Man is in his objects insofar as his objects are in him.

We may pause at this point. Thus far we have described

[13] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 46.

the derivation of the logic of the concrete from the logic of the abstract. It is made possible by the introduction of the subjective element provided by the act of thinking. The full significance of this innovation must be borne in mind as one proceeds to the detailed discussion of the fundamental law of concrete thinking, which follows.

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The logic of the concrete is more complex and difficult than that of the abstract. We have said that the former emphasizes the difference between subjective and objective elements. The expression of this difference, as Gentile renders it, marks it off sharply from the identity-relation of *pensiero pensato*. It might, if we may suggest a parallel terminology, be called a "difference-relation." Looking at the Ego concretely, as that through which we know any object, we may say *Ego=Not-Ego:* [14]

> This is the fundamental law of the concrete *Logos*. It is distinguished from the fundamental law of the abstract *Logos* because the latter, as a principle of identity, expresses the identity of differentiated thought, while the new law . . . expresses the difference in identical thought. It is not a correction of the former but an integrating or verifying of it.

This differentiation within concrete thought, this separation between subject and object, is a concept rigidly excluded from the logic of the abstract. It is the subjective element that makes the difference. The introduction of the subjective element, the *act* of thinking, renders to *pensiero pensante* the possibility of breaking out of the circle of objective thought in the manner already described. Hence *Ego=Ego*. The distinction between subjective and objective elements renders to

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

*pensiero pensante* its full expression. Hence *Ego=Not-Ego.* Thus it may be said that the fundamental law of the logic of the concrete has two necessary forms, *Ego=Ego* and *Ego=Not-Ego.* The first arises in distinguishing the logic of the concrete from that of the abstract; the second arises in expressing what is meant by concreteness as applied to thinking. Let us study these two forms more fully.

Consider the first form. *Ego=Ego* expresses a "subjective identity" very different from the objective identity (*A=A*) of the logic of the abstract. The objective concept (e.g. chair) is what it is. "A chair is a movable single seat with a back" is an example of an objective identity. It fits into an objective system and is static within that system. Concepts are unchanging in this respect: they are inert. But a person as knowing subject himself is changing and developing. A new person is born with every new act of knowing. Man as knowing activity is neither in the past nor in the future: [15]

> But just this is his being, his not being that which he will be—the actuality of this not being. He is a need and a desire for being. . . . The man who does not negate himself, who is fully satisfied with himself, who therefore does not labor, or think, or wish, or do anything at all—he ceases to be a man.

Hence strictly speaking *Ego=Ego* expresses not an identity but a difference. But it is a difference which involves continuity, the continuity of the Ego. It might better be expressed *Ego makes itself Ego,* as Gentile himself admits. The Ego expresses itself in an affirmation, *which is its own affirmation.* This affirmation, as the affirmation of the Ego, produces an alteration in the Ego, and hence raises a difference between two terms. But they are both still the Ego. If I assert that virtue is knowledge I become a new person because I am now the possessor of that assertion and was not before. Whatever assertion follows will necessarily take that assertion into ac-

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

count. Although Gentile uses this first form to express the fundamental law of concrete logic he realizes its inadequacy and allows it to serve only to emphasize the continuous development of the Ego.

Consider the second form. What would be a contradiction in the logic of the abstract is foundational in the logic of the concrete. *Ego=Not-Ego.* The expression of difference here symbolized gives life itself to thinking. This second form proclaims the full meaning of the first. If there were not differentiation between subject and object, and if the latter were not denied reality, we should not be in possession of the ontologically unique *pensiero pensante.* If there were no object to be negated ontologically by my act of thinking I could not think, for to think is to think something. And, more specifically, if there were no Not-Ego to be negated ontologically by the act of the real Ego, there could be no real Ego.[16] I would be nothing if the action of my thought did not intervene to negate my natural being in order that I might be realized in my act of knowing. The abstract Ego which is the point of departure of thought is immediate and natural being (temperament or nature); it is non-thinking and therefore unknowable. It is nothing. *Pensiero pensante* negates this Not-Being by a synthesis creative of the concrete Ego, which is the consummation of thought. Gentile finds a simile helpful here. Ego is like a shining light: Not-Ego is like a shadow. The shadow is the negation of the light and dependent upon the light for its existence. And the light is the negation of the shadow. The two are correlative and must be taken together. Similarly Not-Ego must be negated by Ego, and *vice versa.* We may have neither without the other. The Not-Ego is as necessary to the Ego as shadow is to light. Gentile's use of the two Ego's here, abstract and concrete, is confusing. To put it more

[16] See footnote 2, p. 59 of this study, for the meaning of "negate" in the logic of the concrete.

clearly, "Ego" has two significances: (1) the synthesis of the opposed knower and known, according to which both knower and known (in themselves abstract) are the content of the Ego; and (2) one of the two opposites into which the first Ego is dualized, the knower antithetical to the known, the original term from which thought alienates itself in order to think. Only the first of these is ultimately real and concrete, according to Gentile.[17]

This unity of thinking subject (Ego) and thought object (Not-Ego), in the dynamic and autogenetic act of thinking, is called the Becoming of the dialectic. Becoming is only intelligible as the law of reality if reality is equivalent to thinking. Flux, mutation, evolution in the objective world—all are appearance, images from vague experience. For the world as object is what it is; it is static epistemologically speaking even if it be the Heraclitean Fire. Nothing spiritual exists as natural objects are thought to exist. The spiritual is always in the process of development. The Ego is Becoming, insofar as unified with Not-Ego (i.e. insofar as concrete); and the Not-Ego exists only insofar as the Ego is thus unified.

Furthermore *pensiero pensante* is an immanent Becoming, an eternal unity which is unique and self-developing. Its unity is its characteristic attribute. The attribute of *pensiero pensato,* on the other hand, is to be a multiplicity, as we have seen. It must be a multiplicity in order to be unified according to the laws of abstract thought. We think a multiplicity of objects which we unify into a deductive system. The objects of thought are legion. But concrete thought is the thought of a single consciousness and can have no multiplicity attributed to it. Each act of thinking is the act of the entire concrete Ego; and as such is unified with and includes all previous acts of thinking. If I affirm "Caesar conquered Gaul," as

[17] For this material on the fundamental law of the logic of the concrete see the *Sistema,* Vol. II, Part III, Chapter V.

*pensiero pensato* this is a unification of diverse objects. As *pensiero pensante* it is "I think Caesar conquered Gaul" and expresses the totality of my thinking. I cannot think anything that does not express this totality. This is the significance of the "I think . . ." It is highly important to an understanding of the Gentilian doctrine.

It suggests another major distinction between the logic of the abstract and that of the concrete. The fundamental law of the former is a norm distinct from the thought which it governs.[18] The postulates of foundational logic, for example, govern the thought structure of post-foundational systems. Such is generally the character of a norm. It is usually distinguished from the real as the "ought" from the "is"; as value from fact. The fundamental law of *pensiero pensato* gives thought-as-object value, but the value of this norm is presupposed (i.e. is factual) no matter how self-evident. Final value must rest on a different basis. The truths of abstract reason are truths of fact, stripped of ultimate value. In the logic of the concrete we no longer speak of fact, but of act: the situation with regard to a norm changes completely: [19]

No distinction between the act and the law of the act is possible because of the *sui generis* nature of the act, to which we must pay close attention if we wish to avoid the danger of forfeiting the only firm ground on which the value of all truth can be founded.

The act in its universality cannot be transcended. It must provide its own norm, for according to Gentile's requirements it can admit no transcendent norm. It is unique. Every act of thinking supposes a unique experience and a unique subject. There is no man who thinks who does not think with his

[18] This does not contradict the description of the logic of the abstract given on p 77 of this study The three principles (its fundamental law are within thought abstractly considered. But even when thought is concretely considered, in relation to its verity that is, it is found to be dependent for its validity upon these principles. It is in this sense that the principles are external to it.

[19] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 67.

whole thought. The act of thinking is not something which happens to be thinking and might not be. It is that which is thought and cannot not be thought, thought which is true not because it conforms to a transcendent law but because it is itself the law of truth. The law of the abstract is law, but only as it borrows its value from the ultimate value of the concrete. The concrete act must be *norma sui.* This is the great point in Gentile's logic. How Gentile thinks it to be *norma sui* we shall discover a few pages hence.

Thus all other truth refers back to concrete thought, which *is* truth. The truth lies deep within us. The synthesis, *A=A,* is a fact. The synthesis, *Ego=Not-Ego,* is radically different. It is act. If we ask the reason for the assertion of *A=A,* this assertion itself gives no answer. But the other assertion is vocal. It is thought realizing itself according to the form *Ego=Not-Ego.* It is that self-creation of the concrete Ego which provides a progress or development and which must be *norma sui:* [20]

> Its being is not simple identity, or simple difference, or simple unity of identity and difference. It is this unity as creative of itself, *autoctisi.* It is synthesis as autosynthesis, a synthesis which posits its terms in their synthetic relation.

The synthesis is truly *a priori;* it presupposes neither nature nor an Absolute, nor any other object obscure or otherwise. Before the act in which the concrete Ego celebrates its spirituality there is nothing. A belief in objects determining thought would violate the essential dialectic character of the act and destroy truth as Gentile defines it. The situation is quite the contrary, according to him. When one speaks of such objects the Ego is speaking and determining them (as objects) according to the dialectic law of concrete thought. One cannot refer to "objects" without calling upon the act of thinking which makes them such. Without that act they are not "objects."

[20] *Ibid.,* p. 71.

Again we may pause. Almost the entire force of the logic of the concrete is contained in the two forms of its fundamental law. It asserts two major principles, (1) that the act of thinking is self-creative and progressive, and (2) that the act of thinking requires the assertion of its object *as object* (by negating its being). What follows comes rapidly and unsparingly. In general it consists in the application of these principles to various specific phases of the logic of the abstract in building the logic of the concrete. It is extremely complex. It is offered mainly for those who may wish to make a detailed study of actual idealism. With the exception of (1) the description of the necessity of synthetic *a priori* thinking, and (2) the description of the act of thinking as *norma sui,* the demands of the present study require no part of it.

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Just as the synthesis of abstract thought is founded on the autosynthesis of the concrete, so the *noema* (the act of intelligence which unites subject and predicate) is founded on what Gentile calls *autonoema. Autonoema* is the autogenetic act of intelligence, which for Gentile is reality. Any other reality (either not autogenetic, or not act of intelligence) would be opposed to knowledge: it would be the known opposed to the knowing. The Gentilian real knows itself: [21]

> I am Ego insofar as I have consciousness of myself as distinct from myself, and hence Not-Me; insofar as I know myself knowing something. To know something . . . is to judge. But this judging is the judgment in which I know myself; and therefore I am myself who would not be if I did not know. Thus the judgment may be *noema* only by being at bottom *autonoema.*

The point is that in knowing I know myself as the knower and thereby produce an alteration in myself in such a sense that I

[21] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 75.

(being negated, or synthesized) become a part of the known. And, by the same synthesis, the known becomes part of me. If I think that virtue is knowledge that knowledge becomes part of me as knower. But it can only do so by being negated as object (synthesized with the subject). For this reason the Socratic "Know thyself" should, in a sense, be the formula for all knowledge. To understand things is to understand oneself (as concrete act, not as an empirical subject). The theoretical judgment of the *noema* (e.g. "Virtue is knowledge") becomes real in the actual judgment of the *autonoema* (e.g. "I think virtue is knowledge."): [22]

> . . . The object of the [actual] judgment is a world which constitutes the objective existence of the subject itself, insofar as the subject itself confers this existence.
>
> . . . If the flower which shines resplendent in the sunshine attracts and moves us, it must already be the object of an appreciation and a desire which signify a certain spiritual attitude toward a world. This world would never be anything to us if the subject did not move itself to action by plucking the flower and enjoying close at hand the odor and the possession of it.

The important thing here is that to know anything demands a "spiritual attitude" toward it which, by giving that thing significance, literally creates it.

We must continuously bear in mind that "I think . . ." is a free act, according to Gentile, sharply distinguished from fact. Hence the *autonoemic* act is moral. It presupposes nothing which might determine it. Its freedom is characterized by the *unconditional imperative* of the law of concrete thought. We have found it essential that the concrete Ego actuate itself in objects in general and in itself as object in particular.[23] If it did not it would be an immediate identity. As immediate it would be indifferent and its liberty license. Liberty must be accompanied by law. Either alone is abstract: together they

[22] *Ibid*, p. 77.

[23] See p. 86 of this study.

constitute freedom. Without our liberty to approve them the laws of the state would be tyrannical. Without law our liberty would have no significance or usefulness. It is the same with the act of thinking. We are free only when we willingly obey the laws necessary to our being, so to speak. *Liberty* and *law* are inalienable in the *autonoema*. Liberty without law would be empty spontaneity. And law without liberty could not convey a sense of moral obligation. The law which is our highest ideal and our goal is given by the dialectic of *pensiero pensante* in which our personality expresses itself and the spirit triumphs. Our personality is the concrete Ego which realizes itself in the *autonoemic* dialectic.

Just as the *noema* is insufficient and must be resolved in the autosynthesis of the *autonoema,* so the forms of *noemic* judgment [24] are insufficient and need to be resolved in the *autonoemic*. To the question, "Why?", directed at its judgments, we have seen that abstract logic is silent. Only the concrete Ego can answer this question (which is its own) with ultimate satisfaction. How does it answer it? Why should I, who might not assert some judgment, between asserting it and not asserting it choose the former alternative? Why not refuse the problem? Who imposes it upon me? What necessity binds me to the problem and to a solution in terms of the concrete dialectic? The concrete Ego is bound necessarily to the dialectic and to the objects which it creates because only in the creation of them through the dialectic does it achieve existence. In this way the force of the disjunctive abstract judgment is derived from that of the disjunctive concrete judgment. Quantity and Modality have similar derivations which the reader may work out for himself: [25]

The "why" of the disjunctive affirmation of judgment is in the qualitative disjunctivity of the *autonoema*. And the same thing, as is obvious, may be said of the "why" of the quantitative disjunctiv-

[24] See pp. 68–9 of this study.

[25] *Sistema*. Vol. II, p. 83.

ity of the individual judgment, and of the modal disjunctivity of the assertorial judgment in which is summarized and made potential all of the logical energy of the judgment.

The table of the forms of abstract judgment is the same as the table of the forms of concrete judgment. But the first is ultimately dependent upon the second. The necessity of the abstract judgment, as we have seen, transcends that judgment. Its source is the necessity of the concrete judgment, for the concrete judgment being necessary in itself creates as its object the abstract judgment. If the latter is necessary its genealogy shows that it will be so only insofar as the former is. The same argument holds for the other forms of judgment outlined in the logic of the abstract. The source of each is in the corresponding character of the concrete dialectic.

Hence there are not really two entities, the *noema* and the *autonoema*. They are resolved into a unity. The *noema* is the *autonoema* itself descended from *pensiero pensante* to *pensiero pensato*. According to Gentile it is a form which has become matter in the process of concrete thinking. The act of thinking is a subjective form which in functioning is productive of the objective matter which the act becomes in the subsequent act of thinking about it. The act of thinking "Virtue is knowledge" is form: the judgment that virtue is knowledge is matter to the subsequent act of thinking. It requires a strenuous effort to bear in mind that the Gentilian real is not *pensiero pensante* as we think *about* it, but is the actual thinking about it (or about anything). Matter is form determined and congealed. Form as mediation of itself (or autosynthesis) is the generator of itself as matter. Gentile considers himself to be the first to make this unification of form and matter; for him it is the goal of all idealistic tendencies.

The syllogism of abstract logic is dogmatic in the sense that it presupposes certain laws of thought. It must therefore be referred to what Gentile calls the "autosyllogism," the con-

crete counterpart of the syllogism. The validity of the structure of deductive thinking must be justified. The syllogism is an identity-relation, objective to the act of thinking, as we have seen. As object it does not possess ultimate truth value. The being of any object, of a stone for example, is not in it *as object.* Its being is its entertainment in the mind as object, its partaking of the concrete act of thinking. And so with the syllogism. Its reality is founded not on its immediateness as object, but on the unique, infinite, absolute, and indivisible principle of the Ego. The reality of the syllogism is in the autosyllogism.

The discovery of the autosyllogism enables Gentile to justify both the necessity of the synthetic *a priori* act of thinking and its character as *norma sui.* This justification of the two is certainly the most important part of the very complex thought contained in the second volume of the *Sistema di logica.* It arises out of the curious and unique nature of the disjunction (which, we remember, as abstract made the syllogism possible) in the realm of the concrete: [26]

> The Ego says, "Either I am Ego or I am Not-Ego," finding itself confronted by the curious alternative either of affirming itself by negating itself (as Not-Ego) or of negating itself by affirming itself (as Ego). If the Ego is Ego, it affirms itself; but then it is no longer Ego, because this empty identity is the negation of the process essential to the Ego (which necessitates a differentiation). And *vice versa,* if it is Not-Ego, it negates itself; but exactly in negating itself it succeeds in actualizing its essence.
>
> The affirmation . . . which the disjunction guarantees in the *autonocma* through Quality, Quantity and Modality, is an affirmation which is negation; it is not thesis, but autothesis, and hence Becoming or dialectic. The autothesis of thinking is a consequence even here of a necessity; but of a necessity which is no longer solely logical, but logical insofar as metaphysical.

[26] *Ibid*, pp. 88 and 89. See the criticism of this material in Chapter VII of this study.

This is the rock bottom of the Gentilian doctrine. The Ego between being Ego and Not-Ego *must* choose the second alternative *because in the very act in which the Ego proposes the disjunction it has already made its response and its alternative is taken.* This argument is not one which would fit the logic of the abstract. Gentile does not argue that if thinking is thinking it must be dialectic. This would simply be a syllogism, an argument in a circle, presupposing the dialectic nature of all thinking.[27] Gentile argues by the autosyllogism, which does not depend upon a postulated reality or even an hypothesis. The argument is that quoted above, wherein the statement of the problem is the statement of the answer. In proposing the question as to whether it is Ego or Not-Ego, the Ego establishes the necessity that it be Not-Ego and hence establishes the necessity of its dialectic nature. This is the necessity of *a priori* metaphysical thinking. Upon it Gentile's philosophy is built. And since this necessity is within the very act of thinking the metaphysical problem, and therefore depends upon no presupposed reality (or *Logos*), the *norma sui* character of the act of thinking is also established. In other words, the judgments about the dialectic of thinking are in no sense empirically attained. If they were they would not be necessary and would require a transcendent reality. Thinking *is* the concrete Ego and its law *is* the dialectic.

Autosynthesis describes a figure which breaks out of the closed circle. The concrete Ego is such by virtue of thinking

[27] In Gentile's form:

Either it is true that no thinking can be thought except as dialectic; or it is true that it can also be thought as not dialectic
It is false that it can also be thought as not dialectic.
Therefore, it is true that no thinking can be thought except as dialectic.

In the classical form:

All thinking is dialectic
This thought is thinking.
Therefore, this thought is dialectic.

The circular character of both of these arguments is obvious.

the Not-Ego. But in order to escape the abstract it also annuls the Not-Ego by a new act of thinking which uses this now-old Not-Ego as its material in the production of a new Not-Ego. In other words, the movement of autosynthesis brings new accretions to the Ego at every revolution. In its revolution it returns not to the Ego from which it set out, but to the new Ego which has been brought into being by the act of departure. If this were not so, if the Ego always remained the same, it would become an abstract object (an idea thought) and thinking itself as an act would be annulled. But this annulment is quite impossible, because the abstract object (the idea thought) must be thought *by someone*. By whom? In answering this question we break out of the circle of the abstract and into the territory of the concrete, where the subjective element resides. *Pensiero pensante* describes not a circle but a spiral.

Hence progress. And this progress is qualitative, modifying reality by transforming it, as we have seen. It is never quantitative. Civilization does not progress by the increase of material goods. It progresses by the growth given in the act of thinking. It is a development and not a chain made up of many separate links, to change the metaphor. Thus there is progress only in the concrete. In one place Gentile asks us to think of a flight of stairs, the lower steps of which disappear (are negated) and the higher steps come into existence as one ascends. There is no multiplicity into whose presence thinking is brought. Multiplicity is but a factor necessary to the process which denies it existence. It comprises the object of thinking which must be thought if there is to be thinking at all. By means of the multiplicity of the abstract the activity of the concrete *Logos* is able to pass, maintaining its unity and transforming itself internally, into the rhythm of its process.[28]

[28] The concrete Ego's actualization of itself is the good which includes all others. Though the point is not relevant to the present discussion it should be noted that it is here that the Gentilian ethics arises. See pp. 219–20 of this study.

We are now in a position to give more understanding to some of the material discussed earlier in this study. It is a universal need of man to collect the multiplicity of nature into a universe or cosmos, and the multiplicity of thoughts into a unity of thinking. Reason has always been invoked as the unifying principle. It has been authoritative because one for all thoughts and for all thinkers. The whole history of man is a history of this unifying principle. The great strength of reason has always been considered to be its transcendence or objectivity. Gentile's whole effort is bent toward showing that, on the contrary, the virtue of reason is its immanence or subjectivity. The distinction between heart and brain was drawn by the Greeks in an effort to distinguish between subjective and objective spiritual activity. But according to the Gentilian doctrine truth is subjective and the distinction loses its point. We endeavored to explain this position earlier. Its necessary consequence, the unification of heart and brain, should be more clear now that we have described the function of the logic of the concrete in giving life to that of the abstract. Thinking is homogeneous. It is the dialectic, and allows of no distinctions. The brain may conquer in the field of the abstract, but one cannot conquer the heart of a mother with a syllogism, for her heart burns with the spirit that gives life to the syllogism. The syllogism gives a truth, but one which is weakness itself compared to the concrete truth of the spirit.

The problem of the categories goes to the center of every type of idealism.[29] The Aristotelian (analytic) concept of the categories as predicates was followed by the modern concept of the categories as functions. For the idealist this signifies that the category became a product of thought in action rather than an irreducible element or atom of thought. Truth came to be the truth of thinking rather than an objective entity, pro-

[29] For this material on the categories see the *Sistema,* Vol. II, Part III, Chapter VII.

viding a revolution in our thinking as counter to common sense as was the Copernician revolution. Since certain knowledge seemed impossible in a strictly objective view (either rationalistic or empirical), it was sought by introducing the subjective element. But even Kant's doctrine may be said to be but a partial expression of the category as function. Gentile's objection to the Kantian position is two-fold. First, what is the relation between the multiplicity of sensations and the unity of the categories? The category works upon a material that it presupposes rather than creates. Secondly, what is the relation between the multiplicity of the categories (or of the experience which they provide) and the unity of the Transcendental Ego? The multiplicity of categories receives no legitimate deduction: its elements are presupposed in a haphazard fashion. Synthesis *a priori* suggests the impossibility of separating analysis and synthesis, of possessing an analysis which is not synthesized in its character as thought. Yet in Kant's multiplicity of sensations and of categories we have the former without the latter. These multiplicities are posited immediately. Accordingly, in view of the Gentilian requirements for thought, Kant's doctrine recurs to an unreal thought and an unthinkable reality. Nor was the situation improved by the abandonment of the Noumenon. In conceiving the Absolute, Hegel also brought in a Being previous to the spiritual act of thinking. His *Logos* is the intelligibility of the world according to the rational principle of thesis and antithesis. But it none the less transcends the knower in that objective sense which had always been demanded of the norm of thinking. In this way Hegel's logic is dependent upon his metaphysics, indeed his metaphysics is its source. This is precisely where Gentile makes his departure from Hegel, and for the reasons brought out earlier in this study. In contrast to Hegel's (and all others perhaps), Gentile's metaphysics is dependent upon his logic. Gentile's doctrine represents the suppression even

of a spiritual world (waiting to be known previous to our thinking about it) in favor of thinking. Hence whatever category Gentile finds will be unique because it will fall within the act of thinking, which has been described as essentially a unity.[30]

Gentile identifies the category with the autosynthesis of that act. It is the common denominator by which we think all that is thinkable. If we think, that which we think is concrete Ego, the unity of thinking. But it is a unity colored by the profound concept of diversity. There are two ways of thinking the world. We may think it empirically, as the diverse and variegated object of our thinking. Or we may think it "transcendentally" [31] in its original and ultimate virtue as unified thinking: [32]

The world, as we see it with the eyes of the body and the mind, is a world resulting from a process. It is that empirical world which we should transcend in order to think it completely, for a world

[30] "The autosynthetic category is in fact the unity of the predicate-category [of Aristotle] and the function-category [of Kant]; of the former as thought of the abstract *Logos* of the [logic of the] abstract, and of the latter as thought of the abstract *Logos* of the [logic of the] concrete" (*Sistema* Vol II, p 114)

The category is predicate as that concrete predicate which makes thought possible through the synthesis of subject and object made necessary by our act of thinking It is the predicate descriptive of the autosynthesis of *Ego=Not-Ego*, which gives necessity and universality to thinking Autosynthesis is the ultimate and fundamental predicate of thinking, according to the description given above It is very different from the analytic and partial (epistemologically speaking) categories of Aristotle.

The category is function as the function of judgment itself The category as abstract predicate was antecedent to thinking As such it demanded derivation. But Gentile describes the problem of its origin as an absurd problem, because the answer is given in the act of thinking (a function) which asserts the problem The immediacy of the Aristotelian category is absorbed in the mediation of thinking. As a function of thinking it is a conditioning of thought. The organ of thought, wherein the categories of thought might reside, is not only not antecedent to thinking, but it cannot be conceived except as a function of thinking Hence, as Gentile says, it creates itself The function is neither particular nor preëxisting; for then it would create a particular and preëxisting organ The true self-creative function is the organism in its unity as *pensiero pensante* Only so conceived can it be a total and unconditioned reality.

[31] This word is placed in quotation marks to indicate its use in this paragraph in the Kantian sense

[32] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 120.

which is a result of a process is something immediate and hence (in a complete sense) unthinkable until it is resolved into the process from which it results. To think the world in its process, as that principle which develops and is actuated in it, is to think it transcendentally.

The "transcendental" world is the empirical world thought ultimately; but the two are not coëxistent. The multiplicity necessary to the empirical view would wreck the mind if it were not unified in the unique reality of thinking. But this multiplicity should not be put out of mind. We should only put out of mind that absurd multiplicity which is not unified in thought, though actually it can never be in mind to be put out because whether we realize it or not every multiplicity in the mind is also a unity. It is doubly unified; first as the abstract object, and secondly as the concrete Ego. As the abstract object it is partial, and as partial it attains reality only in the unity of the autosynthesis by which it is fused with the subjective act of thinking. It is the unity of this act, of the "I think . . .", that is so significant ontologically. *Pensiero pensante* (*Ego=Not-Ego*) determines the Not-Ego as substance, accident, cause, contingency, Being, Not-Being, etc. Whether the Spinozan substance, the Leibnizian monad, the Platonic Idea, or the miser's gold—everyone has a currency in which he exchanges all forms of reality. But all of the objects of thought, even thought itself as object, are unified by the "I think . . ." of the concrete act. The greater the determination, the more the autosynthetic power of the Ego is realized. All thinking shines in its own light, in other words. It is aware of itself and in this self-awareness it draws its seemingly transcendent world within itself, into one organic interpretation: [33]

It can be said in conclusion that the categories are infinite if it be said at the same time that the category is unique.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

There are infinitely many ways of interpreting this world, but ultimately there is only one, that of interpreting it as auto-synthesis.

The category as the act of thinking, being the synthesis of itself as Ego and as Not-Ego, provides three moments of spiritual development. They are the three aspects of the spirit; art, religion and the sciences, and philosophy. Art is the subjective moment of the categoric act; religion and science the objective moment; philosophy the synthesis into which the act collects itself as unity of self and other. These are three moments through which the unique act is realized. Art and religion and science, however, are sharply to be distinguished from philosophy. All thinking, as dialectic, distinguishes within itself an abstract thought which is solely aesthetic, and one solely religious and scientific. But there is no art concretely and really outside of the thinking which entertains it. And so with religion and science. All three depend for their interpretation upon the philosophic judgment according to which they are entertained. They do not provide concepts of reality (that is, they are not ultimate predicates), but rather aid in the realization of it. Philosophy, in contrast, must be self-interpreting, for it represents the totality of the process of understanding: [84]

> Philosophy is always understood (by philosophers, of course—but who speaks of philosophy without being a philosopher?) as the most universal and perfect form of the spirit, which understands all other forms without being understood by the others in return.

The artist is one whose spirit is aware of the world of his pure and immediate subjectivity. And the religious man or scientist is one whose spirit is full of an object which is the negation of his subjectivity, well betokened by the attitude of prayer or that of bending over a microscope. The philosopher comes

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

to know subjective and objective elements in their unity as the totality of the thinkable.

The passage from abstract to concrete logic, wherein we think by means of the autosynthetic category, Gentile calls the dialecticizing of the concept: [35]

> Dialecticizing is the passage from the concept as opposed, to the concept as identical with, the category; from the opposition of matter and form, to the synthesis *a priori* through which form is generative of itself as matter.

The dialectic exhibits itself as a developing rather than as an immediate Being. "Nature" is not the concept of nature, but the nature itself of our concept as act, the life of our spirit: [36]

> The concrete *Logos* is dialectic; the abstract is not. The abstract as such cannot be dialecticized, and as such in fact is not dialecticized. Fix the concept of nature and you will no longer see the possibility of returning from it to the spirit; just as it is not possible for a heart to beat again which the anatomist separates from the organism in order to see how it is made. But the abstract *Logos* can be maintained in its abstractness, and can be resolved in the concreteness of autosynthesis, in which organism it truly participates. Insofar as it is resolved it is dialecticized, because it coincides with the concrete *Logos*. But then it is no longer the abstractly conceived abstract *Logos* that it was before, but the abstract *Logos* maintained in its original and indelible concreteness. Thus nature as nature cannot be spiritualized; as nature it is abstractly conceived. In the concrete it is the spirit itself.

If *pensiero pensante* were a static synthesis there would no longer be place for dialecticizing. There would be only the closed circle. But *pensiero pensante* is developing. Its dialectic is the germ of our entire spiritual life.

This dialecticizing of the concept provides the last of the transformations from the logic of the abstract to that of the concrete, the transformation from concept to autoconcept. The

[35] *Ibid*, p. 131.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3.

concept is the entertainment of truth as objective to the act of thinking it. The autoconcept is the entertainment of truth as constituted by the very act of thinking. The distinction is one with which the reader should now be familiar. While philosophy was limited to the concept as its material the inevitable result was scepticism, as shown in an earlier part of this study.[37] But in the concrete autoconcept awareness is absorbed into self-awareness. This is precisely the desideratum. We may no longer make the distinction between perception and that which is perceived. Perception is ontologically understood (in answer to the Gentilian requirements) as part of the material created by the formal act of thinking (autoconcept). The autoconcept is the only form of cognition. Even the ordinary empirical distinction between imagination ("art") and intellect ("science") is without significance from the point of view of a reality which is the totality of the thinkable. Such distinctions may be of practical use, but they do not belong to philosophy, for they are raised by the particularizing of something considered as previous to thinking.

However it is not to be supposed that the autoconcept, being free from these distinctions, is empty of all content. On the contrary, it is more than the traditional concept was. It contains the traditional concept and more. The fear of its emptiness is due to a realistic prejudice. The richness of sensation, for example, is contained in the autoconcept, for there is no concept without sensation. But sensation is no longer a channel of communication with an outer world. It is what the act of thinking creates it to be, an objective richness gathered existentially into the act of thinking. This is an alteration in the meaning given "sensation," but Gentile considers the innovation significant and valuable.

Nor is it to be supposed that the autoconcept is a multiplicity of concepts; for the multiplicity is unified by thinking into

[37] See pp. 36–41 of this study.

a dynamic and developing process which is the unity of the "I think . . ." To speak of the multiplicity in this way, to say that the multiplicity is potential in the autoconcept, is correct; in fact outside of the autoconcept there is no development which could be the principle of multiplicity. And there must be such a principle because of the richness and variety of abstract concepts: [88]

The content, then, of the autoconcept is the same as that of the concept, but dialecticized and thus integrated by the negativity of *pensiero pensante.*

This negation of the concept should not be considered a negative element in the autoconcept; it is the life of the autoconcept and makes the formation of the concept possible: [89]

That is, the concept is formed in the dialectic of the Ego, insofar as the Ego negates itself in its immediateness. Now the Ego, negating itself in the concept, is from the first immediate insofar as it is the concept. The concept in its immediateness is equivalent to the Ego which is negated in it. Hence the Ego turns to immediateness, which it must negate according to its law if it is to be Ego. The negativity therefore attacks the concept insofar as the latter (already formed) is the immediate Ego; that is, it always attacks the Ego in order to generate the concept. The negation of the concept, in fact, is the negation of that concept that is not the concept and is the formation of the true concept, always self-creation or autosynthesis.

Translated into clearer terms this is to say that the concept in order to be a significant element in our thinking must be gathered within the self-awareness of the concrete Ego which thinks it. It must be given its place in the reality of *pensiero pensante.* The concept is negated in the sense that it is synthesized with the subjective element; the Ego is negated in the other direction by the same synthesis. Indeed this is what Gentile means when he speaks of "negation" and "negativity."

[88] *Sistema,* p. 142. [89] *Ibid.,* p. 142.

The point always to bear in mind is that according to the Gentilian criteria of truth this synthesis must inevitably be an autosynthesis. Whatever is thought must be attached to the act of thinking. Hence truth is not anyone's fact, but the fact of him for whom it is true. Since he for whom it is true is he who judges it, the truth is ultimately the subject of the judgment (i.e. is act). It is such *if the subject is understood as actual judging and not as previous to the judgment.* To know the world is to construct it in the act of knowing it. Thanks to the negativity immanent in the autoconcept, thought has no dogmas, no determined determinations, no constructed systems. All are ultimately acts and not facts. In this dialectic, or autosynthesis of subjective and objective elements, the abstract and concrete logics are bound together.

The greatest obstacle which actual idealism must face is the realistic conception of the world which centuries of education have ingrained in us. Gentile calls upon us to meet the implications of actual idealism with courage, feeling the truth in the doctrine that the world is ourselves and that Being is knowing. The concept, apart from the autoconcept, is not real. It is the representation of reality. But fused in the logic of the concrete it is reality itself, the only reality we can know. *Esse est percipi.* This paper on which I typewrite is only real as negated. I could not typewrite on it if I did not see it; and I could not see it if in that act I did not make the paper an object significantly entertained in the thinking activity by which I know that I see the paper and am typewriting on it. The paper does not exist in itself; it exists in my act of thinking, which gives it the entire fullness of its meanings. Reality is not discovered; it is the very act of discovery.

The "desire for the circle" (at other times called the "regulative ideal") tempts the human spirit too often to entertain the abstract *Logos* as giving direction to human activity. But its goals are static, rigid and confining. Historically its

ideals have led to tyranny and violence. We are prone to worship the presupposed, an oppressive system of thoughts already completed. But thinking has no conditions, no preassigned limits, no direction imposed from without. It is a totality and a system, but as autoconcept. We think the whole. And in another sense we never think it for this whole is we who think. It is a process which can never be precipitated once and for all into a result: [40]

> . . . If the teacher of a concept is conceivable, if a philosophic school is possible . . . no particular individual, who has already thought his thoughts and written his words down and died, is a teacher. He is a teacher who is Ego, that unique and immortal Ego who has not already uttered but is uttering his words. This is the eternal school, one whose heredity is not a concept or a system of concepts, but the autoconcept with its inquiet and unfailing negativity. It is the school of truth . . . which no scholar will find except in the depths of himself, where he is the same Ego as the teacher who addresses him and invites him to collaborate in the common work.

This passage has obvious reference to our earlier discussion of the doctrine of truth and error. It describes the search for philosophic knowledge not as an effort to acquaint oneself with that which is in its essence independent of knowing, but as a gathering of that which appears to be independent into the activity of knowing it (i.e. "negating" it, as Gentile expresses it) whereby, by virtue of the creativity of that act, its most comprehensive and profound significance is bestowed upon it.

Is this Gentilian doctrine not itself a concept? Certainly it has been analyzed and defined and made to submit to the synthesis of the spiritual dialectic. Insofar it has conformed to the character of the concept. So far as it has been discussed in the *Sistema di logica* it has been an object of thought, and hence unreal. It was real as Gentile thought it and as we, the readers, think it now. But its reality is not in itself as object,

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

rather in our actual thinking about it. If we try to define the concept of the autoconcept we shall fall back into the logic of the abstract, where the autoconcept is not to be found. In other words, we cannot define the autoconcept without violating the logic of the concrete which gives it its meaning. This new logic is not demonstrable; it admits no measuring rod outside of itself for its evaluation. It is the logic by which we think whenever there is thinking. It expresses the nature of thinking. And it is given value by the acts of thinking of every reader of these words. In these ever-new acts it finds both its reality and its truth.

# PART THREE

# THE *SISTEMA DI LOGICA* CRITICALLY CONSIDERED

## Chapter Five

# THE PROBLEM

In his discussion of the Protagorean doctrine that man is the measure of all things, Gentile makes the following arresting remarks: [1]

> In such a doctrine . . . the concept of a transcendent truth seems to have disappeared. Under this semblance Plato combats the doctrine, making a joke of it by objecting that truth would become what it appears to each of us to be. Protagoras ought to agree, says Socrates, that the contrary doctrine is true to his adversary, inasmuch as it appears as such. This is an objection which Protagoras . . . could have deflected beautifully with the same response that Gioberti gave to an analogous objection. Gioberti foresaw that to his doctrine of the diversity of Catholicism, by which there must be admitted as many Catholicisms as there are men who embrace it, it would be objected that "the Pope, the bishops, etc., do not understand Catholicism in this way." He answered: "Those who make this objection to my doctrine do not understand it. I reply that if they understood it as I do they would not be right but wrong." In just admitting that by his account Socrates was right against him, Protagoras would demonstrate the superiority of his doctrine over that of Socrates. In fact, according to Socrates' doctrine, if Socrates is right Protagoras is wrong; while according to that of Protagoras, Protagoras is right and *therefore* Socrates is right also.

Protagoras' subjectivism was based upon a doctrine of the relativity of sensation, a crude and early solipsism soon dismissed in the history of subsequent philosophy. Plato's commentary in the *Theaetetus* functioned as its *reductio ad absurdum,* caused the abandonment of the doctrine of knowl-

[1] *Sistema.* Vol. I, pp. 63–4.

edge as purely the acquisition of sensations, and led to the conceptualism of Aristotle. Since the time of Protagoras there have been other and more broadly founded solipsisms. It is to the credit of Plato that in the *Theaetetus* he provided an argument so universal in significance that it not only supplied an answer to Protagoras' sensationalism but became a prolegomenon to all future doctrines of a similar nature. It pointed out in effect that the solipsist must accept the contrary judgments of others on non-verifiable questions quite as readily as his own. For one thing, he must turn metaphysics over to the poets and content himself with the consideration of verifiable propositions. In short, according to the *Theaetetus* the solipsist must be a sceptic. Wherever a thinker of solipsistic tendencies has not been willing to accept these limitations the text of the *Theaetetus* has persuaded him to take another direction.

Hence the arresting quality in the passage quoted above. An open and unabashed defense of solipsism is rare today, and when this rashness is coupled with an attempt to establish a metaphysics it takes on the aspect of recklessness. Gentile is a solipsist who, by the very writing of his *Sistema di logica,* has evinced his refusal to accept the Platonic limitations. He voices the conviction that he can combine solipsism with the teaching of metaphysics. On the face of it, this conviction appears of doubtful legitimacy. If it is to be defended successfully Gentile will be required to make an original contribution to philosophic thought, for in the past the attempt cannot be said to have been successful. In its widest sense solipsism is the doctrine that there is no existent except conscious thinking, from which it follows as a corollary that thought can know nothing but its own modifications and states.[2] Solipsism may

[2] A reader of this manuscript has kindly pointed out the need for further clarification of "solipsism" as applied to Gentile. It does not differ from either "subjective idealism" or "mentalism" if mind is considered as a principle of activity and not itself a real object known by acts of thinking. But this is not usually the case. These names are avoided because of Gentile's insistence *not* that "only mind

also be defined as that doctrine which asserts that there is no existent except the knowing subject, or Ego. It will be seen that Gentile believes, in company with most philosophers but for an entirely different reason, that solipsism in this latter sense is not defensible. In this connection the distinction between the act of thinking and the Ego is extremely important. In our use of the word "solipsism" we shall have the first of these definitions in mind, that first being more fundamental than the second.

Among contemporary philosophers there are two major attitudes with regard to solipsism; that of those who dismiss it as false, and that of those who dismiss it as meaningless. Those who dismiss solipsism as false are very much in the majority, probably because their position is more nearly coincident with common sense than the other. One of their arguments arises out of a careful examination of what has been termed the egocentric predicament. Faced with the realization that no one as a result of thinking is able to mention anything that is not thought, this argument describes the difficulty as a "methodological" one and adds that while all existing things must have a relation to thought in order to be known at all it does not follow that they do not also exist in relations which transcend and are therefore independent of thought. It is contended, in short, that in stating the case for solipsism the idealist has voiced but not proved it. His error consists not

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is knowable" or that "mind is the fundamental reality," but rather that mind is *knowing* and *its act* is reality. Gentile's idealism is *actual,* not *subjective:* and, contrary to mentalism, it denies the existence of other minds. There is no single word which describes his position exactly Although in its very derivation it refers to the self, which Gentile finds unreal, "solipsism" has been selected for use in this wider meaning because among recent thinkers it has become more than either of the other two symbolic of those very obvious difficulties which actual idealism must face. If solipsism is untenable because it denies existence to everything but the self, actual idealism is even more so and in the same direction because it denies existence even to the self If solipsism is a vice, actual idealism is even more vicious. In one sense, to go beyond the self to the act of thinking as the only existent is to carry the solipsistic trend to its extreme. In this sense Gentile is a solipsist.

in this statement itself but rather in assigning to it the authority of a proof. The issues on both sides of this first controversy over the truth or falsity of solipsism will be compared at length. Gentile must definitely answer the argument of this group if his unreserved solipsism is to receive adequate or convincing defense.

Another of the arguments of those who dismiss solipsism as a false doctrine is most emphatically expressed by the critical realist. Solipsism seems to be so far out of accord with common sense as to be absolutely reckless. If there is no existent except conscious thinking, how are we to account for the apparent independence of the world of nature? We find Gentile saying that thought creates not only the world of nature but all of those entities which come under the general heading of the not-self. On first acquaintance this appears to be pure extravagance. To say that a doctrine does not accord with common sense is not necessarily a serious indictment, of course. Yet there are manifold daily experiences continually dictating a work-a-day common sense which in its practical if not its theoretical significance cannot be denied a place in any metaphysics. Of such a character is our daily experience with nature. It impels us to the belief that in some sense the manifestations of nature are uniform with a uniformity quite independent of thought. Thought might create for itself a world in which water ran up hill, but for all its creative power it is in some manner compelled to "create" the world in which we live as a world in which water runs down hill. We may well believe that the order and uniformity of nature are a creation of thought, yet the specific character of that order and that uniformity is quite evidently beyond the power of thought to alter. So far as the writer is aware, no thinkers previous to Gentile who have denied the Noumenon existence have accounted satisfactorily for the specific character of the order and uniformity of nature. Such an accounting seems to re-

quire a force which transcends and acts upon thinking. Such attempts as have been made by idealists in this direction have usually involved the deduction of the categories of thought, yet it is probably safely declared that no deduction has fulfilled the requirements of the task at hand. Given solipsism, then, as Gentile conceives it, we require that his doctrine bestow a meaning upon the phrase, "thought creates the world of nature," which shall find a place within it wherein the universal experience of men faced with nature fits. If such a meaning cannot be found in his doctrine, the doctrine must be either renounced or altered. This is perhaps the most serious difficulty which Gentile's actual idealism is called upon to meet. In its bare elements the demand would seem to be a damaging one, yet it should be accompanied by the comparatively safe conjecture mentioned in an earlier chapter that Gentile is a man of normal sanity who is as well acquainted with our relation to nature as we are and who would be quite as unwilling to fly into the face of this common experience as we ourselves. We may anticipate either that he has or we have overlooked some factor in the logical development of his doctrine of nature, or that we have or he has overlooked some factor in the statement of the problem.

Those who dismiss solipsism as a meaningless doctrine, the neo-positivists, may nevertheless be called solipsists in a limited sense of that word. Their position has resulted from an examination of the meaning of meaning. They come to the conclusion that metaphysical problems have no meaning because these problems involve the use of the word "real," which they find to be meaningless. If this is the case it obviously follows that they will find Gentile's proposition that the only reality is the act of thinking to be a meaningless proposition. For them the only meaningful problems are those the answers to which are verifiable. Their doctrine is a limited form of scepticism. They believe that philosophy has too long concerned

itself with problems the answers to which are pure guess-work of the poetic imagination. The issues on both sides of this controversy will also receive careful consideration as they bear upon the doctrine of actual idealism. Gentile must definitely answer this argument, that his metaphysics is meaningless, if his system is to receive an adequate and convincing defense.

But a consideration of the task confronting Gentile is complete only when we have examined the difficulty inherent in solipsism as a philosophy regardless of opposing doctrines. The problem which it raises is peculiar to solipsism and must be dealt with in the evaluation of any doctrine which moves in that direction. This difficulty is most often responsible for the contemporary attitude that to describe a doctrine as "leading to solipsism" is equivalent to a dismissal of it as absurd. Knowledge in the philosophic sense is usually taken to mean certain knowledge, a knowledge whose truth may be measured by well-defined criteria. If, as Gentile maintains, the act of thinking is the only existent, by what criteria may it be evaluated? The whole spirit of Gentile's writing indicates that beyond doubt he considers his philosophy to be more than sheer guess-work or the outcome of blind faith. The factor of certainty is obviously present; but if we are to take the solipsistic doctrine seriously this factor must be contained in some way within the conscious act of thinking itself. In short, it would appear that the act of thinking must be its own criterion. The very fact that Gentile has written his *Sistema di logica,* or that he teaches university classes, indicates his conviction that there is a criterion and that it is both universal and necessary. We have seen that the placing of this criterion, if one may speak of "placing" in this connection, within the act of thinking is the result of a unique attempt both in metaphysics and in logic to avoid all presuppositions. Gentile's "presupposition" is similar to what is spoken of in philosophic discourse as "immediate intuition." Immediate intuition is

logically previous to reflection upon it, and in this sense is "presupposed." The "presupposed" of Gentile is not to be identified with "givenness," for it is neither the material of thinking (sensa) nor unalterable. The relation between the "presupposition" and the act of thinking is not, however, logical in a strict sense. The "presupposition" is simply *previous to* the act of thinking. As employed in traditional metaphysics it is that norm which furnishes truth value to thinking when thinking is not *norma sui*. As previous to the act of thinking (which is mediate, as we have seen) it may only be intuited immediately and by the nature of the case may only be arbitrarily chosen. The Gentilian "presupposition" might be spoken of as an assumption, but we shall reserve that word for employment later in a different connection.[3] We shall find ourselves needing two words, and hence shall translate Gentile's *il presupposto* directly and employ it only in the special sense outlined above.

The significance of Gentile's solipsism is contained in his conscious and strict effort to avoid presuppositions. Thus the general difficulty which he has to face is that of breaking through a firmly established philosophic tradition against which it is not easy to understand how he can proceed, the presuppositional grounds of certainty being removed. This difficulty appears in two aspects. The first aspect questions the possibility of avoiding presuppositions in metaphysics. Gentile is undoubtedly running with the current of contemporary thought in doubting the certainty of presuppositions, and the reason for his doubting should therefore not be difficult to understand. There is place at the moment only to point out that one of Gentile's problems will occur in persuading us that the certainty which he claims to have found without the aid of presuppositions is itself free from presuppositional support. This is the problem of the relation of Gentile's metaphysics to those

[3] See pp. 141–2, 206 and 209 of this study.

of others who are not sceptics, those who maintain their position firmly against contemporary scepticism; e.g. the neo-realists and the absolute idealists. It is difficult to understand how any destructive criticism which he levels against the "presuppositions" so-called of other systems can be turned aside in considering his own. If all metaphysics up to this time has been based upon metaphysical presuppositions it is certainly not to be expected that Gentile's metaphysics can have broken out of the line. Yet that is what Gentile explicitly claims for actual idealism. If Gentile has succeeded in his attempt the contribution to philosophic thought will be evident; if not, to know that he has not will be worth the study.

We discover the second aspect of the difficulty if we look at Gentile's problem from another angle. Let us grant for the moment that Gentile has succeeded in avoiding all presuppositions. Then he is faced by the sceptic as a new adversary. The sceptic makes the same negative criticism of metaphysical presuppositions that Gentile makes, describing them all as resting ultimately in the poetic imagination. But the negative criticism of the sceptic would apply quite as much to Gentile's metaphysics as to any of the others. Hence Gentile is faced with the problem of persuading us that his metaphysics is not sheer fancy. Here the difficulty is equally apparent. We are granting that he has freed himself from presuppositions, and we therefore make a demand of the certainty of his metaphysical knowledge which must be met in an absolutely new manner. This answer should be subject to a most vigorous scrutiny. If Gentile has made a contribution this will be its most significant phase.

There are three paths open to the philosopher in his treatment of metaphysics. First, he can follow tradition and accept the foundation of the study of the real as presuppositional. Presuppositions are just what they would seem to be, unfounded statements concerning reality of so deep an insight as

to produce outstanding metaphysical systems. They are unfounded because if they were not their foundations would become new presuppositions, and so on *ad infinitum*. Within metaphysical systems, in that of Spinoza for example, the contribution of the philosopher is considered to be the rational and clear development of the presuppositions into systems. These systems lay emphasis upon the developmental phase and are critical of difficulties involved in the systems developed by others, as for example Mr. Santayana is critical of Plato. The philosopher, in this view, is a reasoner upon poetical intuitions. His metaphysics is a description of reality.

Secondly, there is the path of those who are embarrassed by the intuitional element in metaphysics and who turn from all metaphysics lest the philosopher's office become identical with that of the poet. Thinkers who follow this path limit knowledge to that knowing which is verifiable. These are the neo-positivists. In the application of their knowledge they work upon presuppositions which are so generally recognized that they shed from themselves the uncertainty which usually surrounds presuppositions. Neo-positivists accept, for example, the generally recognized doctrines of the objectivity and uniformity of nature. They conceive the function of philosophy as the building and testing of hypothetical judgments, knowledge being a tentative product of experience. The philosopher is the student of the ways of knowing the world in which we live. He is primarily epistemologist and logician.

The third path, exemplified in the *Sistema di logica,* will be the object of criticism in Part Three. For reasons which we have already noted, Gentile would avoid metaphysical presuppositions yet would avoid scepticism by remaining a metaphysician. In the one effort Gentile is not in conflict with the entire history of philosophy up to the present time. There have been earlier attempts to avoid presuppositions, notably those of Fichte and Avenarius. But his effort has been so

strenuous that, having the historical advantage of the others, it carries him beyond these previous attempts. It sets him apart from all other metaphysicians. In the other effort, that to avoid scepticism, he is trying to preserve one of the major meanings of philosophy as its history has brought it to us. Gentile is, then, both a violator and a defender of the philosophic tradition. His position is comparatively unique. The attempt to develop a complete solipsism is in itself a significant contribution to philosophic thought, whether or not it is successful. Whatever the outcome of our inquiry it is clear that the measure of Gentile's contribution will be directly determined by the thoroughness of his attempt.

The *Sistema di logica* is not a panacea for philosophic ills, though undoubtedly Gentile at times gives the impression that he thinks it is. It is the labor of an admittedly capable thinker in an attempt to shed new light upon one of the oldest of philosophic problems, that of the nature of the truth of metaphysical judgments. Like the rest of us, Gentile errs at times: in discovering his errors we shall be warned not to make the same ones. Like all capable thinkers in the field of philosophy, he offers the rest of us something new: in finding it there should be some profit.

## Chapter Six

# THE GENTILIAN TERMINOLOGY

In any systematic study of a man's philosophy it is important to consider the meanings assigned to the words he uses. It is true that the words employed by the philosopher are to some degree standardized, but it is also true that within this standardized usage there is a freedom which is bewildering to exact thinking. It is responsible for much needless argument and futile debate. One often hears the wish expressed that a symbolism might be developed in philosophy which would make possible greater precision and swifter understanding. For example, the word "real" has at least two major meanings. It may connote the pragmatically verifiable or the essential. If one speaks of a "real" oasis one uses it in the first of these meanings; if one speaks of the "real" man one is probably using it in the other. We may assume a critical attitude toward Gentile's doctrine only when we have begun by examining the dissimilarities of connotation which his terminology exhibits with reference to our own. The difference, already noted, between the Gentilian use of the word "logic" and the use of it to which we are more accustomed prompts the expectation of a broad difference in the employment of other terms. If there were no explicit recognition of these differences it would be quite impossible either to interpret correctly or to evaluate the philosophic contribution made by Gentile. He writes in another language and from another culture, but there is a sufficient kinship between his language and culture and our own to relieve those factors

of the major responsibility for the differences in terminology which we are about to discuss. The differences are of the nature of those found whenever two philosophers meet, and are due to the fact that in his employment of language the philosopher must consider both customary usage and the exigencies of distinctions within his thinking. If he did not consider the former philosophy would be barren so far as its meaning for other men is concerned. If he did not consider the latter he would fail to perform the function of the philosopher. More often than not these considerations conflict. Customary usage is inexact and ambiguous, employing too few words for the meanings which the philosopher finds. The philosopher needs a larger vocabulary than the one at his disposal.

The first word of all, "philosophy" itself, may be taken in one of several meanings. Within certain limits, of course, the philosopher is free in defining the function of his profession. Gentile does not overstep this boundary. He makes the following definitive statements: [1]

> Philosophy has always been forced to think not of this thing or that thing, but of all things in their unity.
>
> A philosophy of many problems is mythical; a philosophic philosophy knows but one. . . . Men will never orient themselves in nor render clear account of this world, which is the torment of their philosophy because the torment of their lives, unless they become accustomed to think of their philosophy, through which their world grows, as their own life and their actual personality. From this life and personality we can never separate ourselves, even in dreams.
>
> . . . By philosophy is always understood . . . the most universal and perfect form of the spirit, which understands all other forms without being understood by them in return.

These statements do not establish any principle of unity, intellectual or otherwise, though the principle later established is that provided by the act of thinking. Gentile simply means

[1] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 12; Vol. II, pp. 246 and 129; respectively.

that philosophy is the all-inclusive science, the science of art and religion and science, the knowledge of all knowledges. It seeks an answer to those universal problems which pervade all of our thinking; life, death, the nature of existence, etc. A problem to be a philosophic problem must concern the unification of the partial phases of understanding into a whole. For example, the flower as seen by the artist who is painting it is only partially understood, as form and color. The "Flower in the crannied wall" is a perfect example of a second type of understanding of the flower according to a partial aspect. Even the flower studied botanically is but partially understood. But this same flower as an element in all existence is philosophically understood. The difference in a striking and concrete form is that between a scientific treatise on the bee and Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee*. Philosophy, since it is a unity of all thinking, is ultimate. Since it gathers everything within it, it can allow nothing external upon which it might be founded. It is ultimate as the unity of the whole, not as bringing to light an Aristotelian substratum. The difference will be found significant.

Such a definition of philosophy suggests at once the Gentilian definition of the "real": reality is the totality of the thinkable.[2] Here, again, is a legitimate use of terminology. It has been employed by those (of whose number Gentile is not one, by the way) who have sought a coherence theory of truth. The test of a concept of reality is found in the significance of its opposite. In Gentile's doctrine all thoughts which are not concepts of the totality are concerned with that which is unreal and provide the material of the particular sciences rather than of philosophy, which is the universal science of thought. Thus, by definition, the entities studied by astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, etc., are unreal in the sense in which Gentile uses that word. Every-

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 12.

thing particular studied as particular is abstract and therefore unreal. Gentile's definition of the abstract, in fact, is that it is that which is separated off from the totality. Philosophy, in contrast, is concrete. The two conditions of philosophic thought are (1) that its object be particular, and (2) that its object at the same time be universal.[3] Either element without the other results in an abstraction, merely a part of the whole. If we think our objects as particular, they are particular with relation to an inclusive unity (universal): if we do not think them as particular, they are (for us) not real.

The divergence of this meaning for "reality" from the ordinary one is not indicative of a flaw, though it does represent a limitation. The question is entirely one of the use of words. Gentile might have reserved "reality" for the entities of the natural sciences, and used some other term for the "totality of the thinkable." Why did he not do so? There are probably two reasons. In the first place, there are no other words eligible for the position that do not carry connotations equally misleading. Even "One" and "Unity" are misleading, for they connote a transcendent One and a transcendent Unity. These two words are also rendered unfitting by the second reason, that in the history of philosophy the "real" has often been endowed with an element of value (not present in "One" and "Unity") which is exactly what Gentile's concept aims to express. From the time of early philosophy the "real" has been given significance by its opposition to the "apparent." Philosophy seeks to get behind the apparent. It seeks the true meaning behind common opinion. It is understandable and almost to be expected that in fulfilling this function certain words in common use will be selected to express less common meanings. Since in spite of the crooked appearance of a stick half in water it is customary to say that the "real" stick

[3] *Ibid*, p 9. This is important to the later discussion See pp. 159 and 212 ff. of this study.

is straight, it is reasonable that philosophers should retain this word for their more profound but similar inquiries into the latent character either of the objects of experience or of experience itself. One might go so far as to say that "real" has always had the philosophic meaning but that in the philosophy of the mythical man in the street it has always, and perhaps naïvely, been made to signify natural objects as known by the natural sciences.

Knowledge has usually been understood to be the apprehension of the real. Gentile makes it explicit that he agrees with this definition so long as "apprehension" is taken to be a mediate process.[4] Cognition is therefore in his mind sharply distinguished from intuition. Nothing of which one is immediately aware is an object of knowledge. All mysticism is by definition denied a place under Gentile's philosophic sun. Knowledge must have certainty, whereas that of which one is immediately aware has no foundation which could lend it certainty. Animal faith renders judgments which are typical of those that Gentile will not admit into knowledge. And since the real is defined as the totality of the thinkable and knowledge is the apprehension of the real, only philosophy provides knowledge. Art, religion and the sciences rest upon concepts which by their particularity (and hence abstractness) cannot be termed knowledge. Their basic concepts are immediately intuited, and therefore arbitrary.

A reasonable opponent will probably concede the legitimacy of Gentile's interpretations of the words discussed above. Gentile's interpretation of "truth" and "error" presents a more questionable situation, however. A correct understanding of his use of these two words will lead far toward an understanding of the difficulties which actual idealism encounters, and toward a criticism of it as it stands in the *Sistema di logica.* Throughout the history of philosophy, as Gentile himself

[4] See pp. 44–5 and 47–9 of this study.

admits, the concept of truth has endowed it with the attribute of objectivity. In other words, the truth has been true regardless of who possessed it. It has been independent of subjective influences. With regard to this problem of the nature of truth Gentile seems to be of two convictions. We have paraphrased him as saying that one of the three elements of truth is that it is distinguished from opinion by its universality; it is measured by the *Logos* common to all thinking and hence is distinguished from individual opinion.[5] Other subjects if they had the same spiritual background could not think otherwise. Yet on the other hand he has been quoted as saying that the logic of the concrete can recognize only *my* truth and *my* error.[6] How are these two positions to be reconciled?

Gentile speaks of the double significance of "truth," each of its two aspects corresponding to a different concept of the *Logos*. There is first of all the objective *Logos* of which Parmenides spoke, presupposed and transcending the individual. In the second place there is the subjective *Logos* of which Plato spoke in *Cratilus* (385B), which may be true or false depending on who is speaking. The former is itself nothing because immediate: the latter by itself is nothing because not universal: [7]

> . . . The objective *Logos* has value as the content of the subjective and we can only affirm it at the time when we know it and insofar as we know it; and *vice versa,* the subjective *Logos* has its truth value insofar as it contains within itself the objective. Nevertheless, without the distinction between the objective *Logos* and the true but subjective *Logos,* the logical problem would not arise.
>
> In fact the *Logos,* the object of logic, is the true *Logos* insofar as distinguished from the false. But how would this distinction be possible if . . . there did not intervene a measure superior to this subjective *Logos,* which may be true but may also be false? . . . Nor can the measure be other than a *Logos* absolutely true, removed from the

[5] See p 36 of this study.
[6] See p. 111 of this study; also the *Sistema.* Vol. II, pp. 12–3.
[7] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 47.

possibility of being false. But if for the object of logic one wishes to assume an absolutely true *Logos,* or the objective *Logos,* without opposing it to the false, that *Logos* as such, not having the false set against it, would not be true. In the mechanical brutality of its being it would descend below thought and not be affirmable by it.

Logic has for its object thought as the unity of the subjective and objective constituents, and as such is true. Thus it may be said both that truth is distinguished from opinion by its universality and that it is the truth of the subject. "I think virtue is knowledge" is true because it is the result of a mediate synthetic process *a priori* and thus is differentiated from any arbitrary opinion I might utter, and at the same time because it is my assertion. This union of the two elements represents the uniqueness of the Gentilian "truth." By the method of immanentism Gentile brings the *Logos* within the subject; that is, within thought in action: yet makes it, by the nature of thought, different from the particular opinion of the subject. In this way the truth is given a meaning different from its common meaning in that it is no longer measured by a *Logos* external to thought. A judgment is not true for Gentile because of structural relations between an entity (or entities) external to thought and thought itself.

In spite of the immanentism involved there are aspects of this concept of truth which give it some common ground with the usual one. The Gentilian truth is dependent upon a *Logos* which is within thought and *norma sui* but none the less *norma.* Its criteria are not, in other words, fulfilled by an arbitrary whim. Truth is not without a *Logos:* the difference is that Gentile's *Logos* is provided by thought itself rather than imposed upon thought by a transcendent reality. The point which Gentile is trying to make is that if the basis of truth were objective, transcending thought, we could never because of its very nature know it as truth and differentiate it from error without making a judgment which itself requires a norm.

What makes truth true is the subjective element which opposes it to error. In itself a judgment is neither true nor false. "Virtue is knowledge" only becomes true or false when asserted by the act of thinking, "I think virtue is knowledge."

There are two kinds of truth. There is first that of the natural sciences. This truth is dependent upon an objective *Logos* presupposed to any thinking about natural objects. Of such a type is the judgment about the "true" oasis. One investigates the verity of this judgment by the simple pragmatic expedient of riding toward the visualized oasis to find out if it is "really" there. The *Logos* here is uniform nature. The word "truth" is so often employed in this sense that it would be seriously inconvenient to use any other. But it is necessary to point out that this is not a philosophic "truth," according to Gentile, but a "truth" of a particular science. This position is no less reasonable than the position that the world of natural objects is not the "real" world. The thought of the philosopher in this case, as in the other, simply moves beyond what are considered to be the naïveté and limitations of common sense.

The second type of truth, philosophic truth, is itself divided into two parts. In the first part we find the truth of abstract logic, based upon its three principles. It is called philosophic because it deals with thought structure, but has objectivity in common with the former. In this case the truth value depends upon the consistency of the concepts involved. Hence that error which is ignorance parading as knowledge, of which Gentile speaks.[8] This is the error most often committed by the thinker who does not gather his fundamental notions into a conceptual system in order to test them for their consistency. In the second part there is the truth of the logic of the concrete, which is such only in relation to the error of someone else. This latter truth (and its corresponding error) are clearly exemplified in the educative situation of teacher and

[8] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 103.

pupil face to face.[9] To each of these, and rightly, the other represents error. The child's calculation may be wrong according to the laws of arithmetic, but *to the child* it is right until he himself understands that it is wrong.

It is unfortunate that in Gentile's exposition of actual idealism both of these concepts are included under the single word "truth," for they are quite different. In applying the first, one is judging according to the objective standard provided by the fundamental principles of the logic of the abstract. Philosophy being defined as concrete thought, this "truth" should be excluded from the province of *philosophic* verity. Yet it is this concept which allows Gentile to say that ignorance parading as knowledge is in error. It is in error because of inconsistencies involved. Such a concept is both important and useful. Gentile himself constantly employs it in his criticism of materialism as a philosophy. We are all subject to inconsistencies and encounter them frequently in arguments with others. We employ the second concept of truth also but recognize it less often because it appears at that point at which most arguments arrive at an impasse. In applying the latter, one is judging according to a standard *objective* to the *empirical* subject (hence universal) but *subjective* as an act of thought (hence *my* truth and *my* error). It is with this second truth that Gentile is ultimately concerned, and he does not always realize that it may not coincide with the first. According to this second concept the materialist is right and Gentile is wrong, *for the materialist,* and the unique character of the Gentilian solipsism appears. According to the first the materialist is definitely in error: according to the second he is both correct and in error depending upon the point of view. In the fullness of his actual idealism Gentile is quite wrong in applying "truth" to the first concept. His vehement criticisms of opponents are thoroughly out of keeping with the tolerance to

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

which actual idealism should inevitably lead. At such times he is forgetful of the meaning for "truth" which is foundational to his position. The difficulties which arise in the employment of the second concept will be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it now to say that Gentile uses the word "truth" in more than one sense and that in a study of actual idealism the two must be sharply distinguished.

The subjective element in the Gentilian "truth" needs further comment. To retrace our steps for a moment, truth value has in the history of philosophy been couched in objectivity. The meaning of truth has been that its value has been objective with relation to the thinking subject. In contrast, Gentile finds truth value in the morality of the free act of the thinking subject. This moral value, excluding all entities transcending thought, makes "truth" something different from what philosophers have customarily meant by that term. One may reasonably take the position that by the establishment of the doctrine of pure immanentism Gentile is concerning himself with a concept of truth which is simply not what one means by that word. If one takes this position Gentile must be classified as a sceptic, for he certainly believes that "truth" as ordinarily defined is not only inaccessible but "unthinkable." But before assigning him to this group, consider the form which the Gentilian "scepticism" takes. As we shall use the term, scepticism asserts the impossibility of a universal and necessary knowledge of reality. Gentile avoids this position by redefining "reality," "knowledge," "universal," and "necessary." He claims to have found a universal and necessary knowledge of reality which does not depend upon a *Logos* transcending thought.

The nucleus of this claim is found in what Gentile considers to be the "unthinkability" of the traditional metaphysics.[10] It is this sense of unthinkability that leads Gentile

[10] See, for example, the *Sistema,* Vol. I, p. 164; Vol. II, pp. 193 and 197.

to side with the sceptics in their negative criticism of traditional views. What is this "unthinkability"? It seems to be the error potential to the logic of the abstract. A transcendent matter is unthinkable because in the thinking of it one encounters an inconsistency. But obviously the materialist *thinks* his materialism, no matter how great its "unthinkability." Gentile must admit this, for he defines "thought" implicitly as the entire activity of the spirit whether intellectual or emotional.[11] Yet according to the Gentilian concept of the philosophically true, this which is "unthinkable" must be true for the materialist. This looseness of terminology is unfortunate and presents difficulties to our understanding of which Gentile does not seem to be aware. Of the two meanings which may be given to the word "unthinkable" by actual idealism only one appears to be defensible. Gentile employs most often the meaning which is not. Materialism is "unthinkable" in the sense that the fundamental concept, "matter," is an immediate product of intuition; in other words, a presupposition. Now, thinking being defined as a mediate process, "matter" is in a definite sense "unthinkable." Anything transcending thinking may be interpreted as unthinkable. But "materialism" is different. It is a product of thinking and as such must be thinkable. Yet we find Gentile saying that the "thought" of the materialist is "unthinkable." Such a statement is in itself quite useless. Indeed according to Gentile's own interpretation of the logic of the concrete all acts of the spirit are thought regardless of consistency, and all thought is true for the thinker who thinks it. What can Gentile mean? He is apparently trying to make a distinction between a comparatively narrow "unthinkable" and the all-inclusive "thinking." "Unthinkability" is an adjective which Gentile applies to the thought of an opponent. In employing it he means to

[11] See, for example, the *Sistema,* Vol II, pp 98–100. See also p. 258 of Carr's translation, *The Theory of Mind as Pure Act,* for a good example of the difficulty of this terminology.

say that materialism is thinkable to the materialist (obviously, or he would not think it) but unthinkable to Gentile (because he is an idealist). There is no thinking that is self-contradictory *to the thinker:* if it were he would not think it. Materialism, for example, is only self-contradictory to someone who is not a materialist. Hence the "unthinkability" of the "thinkable." In fairness to his readers Gentile ought to express this in a less bewildering manner. To apply "thinkability" only to one's own thinking rules out with a high hand the thinking of others. The idea behind this ruling may be legitimate, but it is the idea of *validity,* not of *thinkability.* To use the latter word is to stretch language usage too far.

We return, then, to the problem of the scepticism of Gentile. According to the usual employment of "truth" as involving a transcendent *Logos* Gentile is a sceptic. But using his own concept of truth, he is no longer a sceptic if the sceptic be defined as one who asserts the impossibility of a necessary and universal knowledge of reality. The use of the phrase "necessary and universal" introduces one final consideration. What does Gentile mean by these terms? [12] By "universal" he means in part what all mean by that term. A universal truth is one which, while it is *my* truth, is universal in the sense that it is measured by a *Logos* common to all thinking, overcoming the bounds of the empirical individual. But the "necessary" part of the phrase is more difficult. For Gentile the necessity cannot be a necessity imposed upon thinking from without, as is customarily supposed when "necessity" is brought to mind. The necessity to which Gentile refers is a moral necessity (hence the moral value) based upon the freedom of thinking. When Gentile speaks of the necessity of truth he refers to a necessity imposed from within.[13] It is the necessity which Gentile claims to find in his examination of

[12] See pp. 35–6 of this study.

[13] See the following chapter of this study for a criticism of Gentile's account of this necessity.

the logic of the concrete. The freedom involved is the freedom found in the doctrine that there is nothing which can condition thought. The necessity involved is the impossibility of thinking otherwise than as we must, by the nature of thinking. This necessity, while differing from the necessity of which one ordinarily conceives in dealing with problems involving truth, nevertheless performs the same function in providing value, and cannot be criticized from a terminological point of view.

To summarize this discussion of terminology, when Gentile writes of "knowledge," "truth," "necessity," "universality," "thinkability", and even of "philosophy" itself, he is not referring to the concepts with whose connotations we are familiar by custom. Not only does he use them in a strictly philosophic sense, but in a sense further limited within that sphere. Having defined "philosophy" and "reality" as he has defined them, he retains the essential part of the connotations of the other words and rejects that part which is not essential. This he has a right to do; but we shall not understand him if our connotations are not for the time made coincident with his. In two important cases we have found him using the same word in more than one sense. First, he uses "truth" (and hence "error") in both the philosophic and the non-philosophic senses, according to his own interpretation of "philosophic." There is the error in the realm of the abstract, arising out of logical inconsistency; and there is error in the realm of the concrete, arising out of equally consistent (to their thinkers) but differing doctrines. And secondly, Gentile uses "unthinkable" to describe both immediate presuppositions and the thinking of his opponents. In the former case (i.e. that of "truth" and "error") there should be two pairs of words if language can supply them. We use "truth" and "error" in both senses without often enough making the distinction here disclosed. It is important in reading Gentile to know which

meaning for these words he is using at the time. In the second case, one of the uses of "unthinkable" is quite without justification not simply because of the confusion for which it is responsible but more precisely because Gentile does not mean to deny the quality of "thinkability" when he so uses the word. "Thinkability" and "thinking" should be reserved for that which is most fundamental to actual idealism, the entire activity of the human spirit, whether intellectual, emotional or otherwise. This in itself is a clear departure from ordinary usage, but is not uncommon among philosophers.

Gentile's opponent is quite free to charge him with the misuse of any of these concepts, on the ground that he is not sufficiently respectful of tradition. Concepts are built by tradition. If one wishes to say, for example, that thinking is given "value" only by that which transcends thought, one is at liberty to do so. With such an opponent Gentile could only be concerned in demonstrating the peculiar nature of that "value" when persistently examined. Of this type are many of the most frequent and important of the philosopher's functions. Concepts are given certain connotations and certain usages. The philosopher may discover that in some cases neither the connotation nor the usage is adequate. This happens most clearly with the word "real." Do only real entities exist, and are existent things tangible? Once asserted it is not difficult to label the inadequacies which are usually contained in such a position. Even if this naïve position is consistently maintained the philosopher can show the peculiar nature of the "real" which results from it. He says, "You are welcome to this use of the word, for it retains part of the customary meaning of it; but what about the other meanings?" Sometimes new words are needed, but more often the full connotation of a word should be examined more thoroughly. Gentile is disconcerting but instructive. It is his claim that the words we have been examining must receive stated alterations in their

connotations if that which is essential to these connotations is to be preserved. The justification of his position must be found, if at all, in his interpretation of what in the connotations of these words is essential.

The difficulties found in Gentile's uses of the words "error" and "unthinkability" are characteristic of one of the great weaknesses of the *Sistema di logica,* namely the frequent though not constant abuse of words. Such words as "real" and "concrete" and "pure" are loosely employed. Others, such as "negate" and "mediacy," have one meaning in the logic of the abstract and another in the logic of the concrete. This double use of words is the source of the difficulties in connection with "error" and "unthinkability." When one examines the logic of the concrete, furthermore, one meets many terms (e.g. autosynthesis, autosyllogism, autoconcept) quite unfamiliar even to a reader trained in philosophic discourse. Though it is true that actual idealism is of such a character as to prompt at many points the employment of a special terminology, Gentile leans too heavily on it and thus is prevented from conveying the fullness of his meaning to his readers and critics. It would have helped him enormously if he had made a greater effort to build his metaphysical structure out of material more familiar. This weakness is the more annoying when the position is taken, as we shall take it, that actual idealism is in essence a simpler doctrine than Gentile's elaborate conceptual superstructure allows it to be. Might even the seemingly essential "Ego" and "Not-Ego" have been avoided? If such is the case Gentile's logic could be greatly clarified.

This discussion of the Gentilian terminology may be concluded by indicating two minor foibles contained therein. Gentile applies the word "dogmatic" to *all* philosophy which relies upon presuppositions; all philosophy that is not actual idealism is "dogmatic" as far as the writings of Gentile are concerned. This is certainly an abuse of that word. That is usually consid-

ered "dogmatic" which disregards reason. This has been the traditional use of the word even in the field of philosophy. Kant, for example, reserves it in the *Critique of Pure Reason* for those who attack a proposition in itself rather than the proof of the proposition. Gentile lends color to his argument by the over-use of words. In a strict sense, of course, he is correct in this instance; for those who base their proofs of propositions upon presuppositions are dealing with presuppositions and not with proofs. And this is what he claims that all of those who employ a transcendent real are, because of the circularity of their thought, doing. But broadly speaking, the dogmatist is usually willfully dogmatic. It would be more gracious for Gentile to use another word. This weakness for color is found throughout the pages of Gentile's writings. Perhaps the most obvious example of it is his use of "absurd," which is thrown around with evident lack of restraint. It seems sometimes as if every doctrine not in agreement with actual idealism is "absurd." Perhaps it is *to Gentile,* and perhaps he wishes in this manner to emphasize his full-blown solipsism. But he is giving the wrong emphasis, and the effect upon his readers is more harmful than otherwise. To see a doctrine which one has entertained in all seriousness and intellectual honesty described as "absurd" is not an experience conducive to friendship. As a matter of fact, Gentile's solipsism should more than any other lead to tolerance of other positions. One quotation we have already made indicates this most clearly.[14] In his militancy Gentile is missing one of the essential elements of his doctrine. If we could strike the "absurds" and the "dogmatics" alone from Gentile's writings we should gain him more profitable consideration from his contemporaries. Of the two the former is more serious. Certainly "absurd" is a word which one philosopher should use only rarely and with great caution in describing the work of another. Better never use it.

[14] p. 111, of this study.

## Chapter Seven

# THE GENTILIAN SYSTEM

The outstanding characteristic of actual idealism is its attempt to develop a metaphysics without the use of presuppositions. We have seen that if such an attempt is made the resultant metaphysics must be based upon a *Logos* which is not previous to thinking but is within the act of thinking itself. But can even this extreme immanentism be entirely without presuppositions? Is it possible to develop a metaphysics without presupposing anything? Must not every philosopher start with certain concepts which are given as basic, the concepts of "philosophy" itself and "reality"? When Gentile writes that his philosophy is presuppositionless must we not understand him in a definitely limited sense? There is nothing in his writings to indicate that he finds it necessary to limit the meaning of that statement. He asserts that there can be nothing outside of the act of thinking which could govern it or by which it could be measured. But is this synonymous with a statement that the act of thinking in developing its metaphysics is without the benefit of presuppositions? We have selected four illustrations from Gentile's writings, the first two of which will defend him against obvious criticism in this connection, and the latter two serve to explain his meaning with regard to presuppositions more in detail. The merit of his position will be considered in succeeding chapters.

One of the problems with which idealists are most concerned is that of the existence of other selves. Josiah Royce argued in his last lectures on metaphysics that the existence of other

selves was implied by the existence of the self; the self for its fulfillment requires other selves upon which to act. It is true, according to a dialectic logic, that the self requires the not-self for its existence. But that this not-self need include other selves is not so clear. It may be true empirically, but is it true *a priori?* It is at least conceivable that Gentile on a desert island, without the benefit of a history of past thought, without a contemporary exchange of thought, and without any hope for future thought, might have written that which is essential to the *Sistema di logica.* For Gentile the truth has a moral value, but this morality does not imply the existence of other selves. It is a morality based upon the free act of thinking, a Spinozan morality quite different from that involving our choice of action in relation to other human beings. Gentile is never concerned with the existence of other selves. He neither discusses it nor assumes it. To be sure he speaks often of other human beings with thought processes similar to his own, but they are no more real philosophically than his own empirical individuality. He is not concerned with the existence of other selves because he takes the position that we can have no necessary or universal knowledge of the existence of such transcendent entities. The real for him is his own act of thinking, and other selves partake of reality only insofar as they are entertained in thinking.[1] Hence the problem of the existence of other selves does not arise. This is Gentile's complete solipsism appearing again. When he writes of other selves he presupposes nothing.

Gentile does not even presuppose a rational world, as Hegelians do. His world is the world of thinking and partakes of the characteristics of thought, rational or otherwise. It is the essence of his doctrine that it can contain nothing that does not derive from the pure act of thinking, looked at either abstractly or concretely. It is from this point of view that

[1] See the criticism of this position in Chapter IX of this study.

Gentile sets himself the task of building a logic. Having renounced presuppositions and allowed as the foundation of his system nothing but the act of thinking, whatever we shall find there will have to be *a priori*.[2] Furthermore Gentile's logic has one advantage over all other logics with which the present writer is acquainted. It is customary for the logician, aware that his subject-matter exhibits circularity, to be disturbed by the fact that the development itself of a formal structure for the expression of thought requires a formal structure already presupposed, that logic is attained only through the medium of logic. Within either Aristotelian or relational logic the only escape from this difficulty is by way of renouncing all metaphysical considerations. Most logicians do this: those who do not, find themselves in difficulties even more serious. But for Gentile the fundamental aspects of logic are not concerned with contradictories. Logic is not something fixed once and for all in its circularity. It *is* the act of thinking, and corroborates his metaphysics. If there is nothing external to thinking, the thinking itself which is in search of a logic (and a real) *provides in that search its logical principles* (and its real). The *Logos* is found in the act of thinking that investigates it.

We come now to two illustrations which will explain more in detail the meaning of the Gentilian "presupposition." Gentile places himself under immediate suspicion in the earliest pages of the *Sistema di logica* by making a full and complete statement of the doctrine of internal relations.[3] It appears so unheralded that it certainly seems to have the stamp of a presupposition. But careful examination will show that this statement is more correctly traced to an effort to avoid all presuppositions. The metaphysical doctrine of external relations, which states that relations make no difference to the entities

[2] See Chapter X of this study for a criticism of the *a priori* character of the Gentilian judgment.

[3] *Sistema.* Vol. I, p. 6.

which they relate, when metaphysically interpreted becomes the doctrine that there are entities before thought and independent of it. If their relations to one another and to thought make no difference to these entities it must follow that they are *an-sich* and placed so that they can be known by the function of thinking, and hence form that metaphysically previous to thought which Gentile is so anxious to avoid. In a search for the *Logos* the doctrine of external relations is a begging of the metaphysical question.[4] But the doctrine of internal relations as employed by Gentile is not a presupposition unless an absence of presuppositions is itself considered to be one. It arises rather out of the position that any philosophic knowledge of reality must of necessity come from within thinking itself. Such a position must take unto itself the doctrine of internal relations, for if all entities are contained within the act of thinking they will consist of their relations to one another within thought. This position comes from an exact statement of the philosophic problem on the basis of the concepts which we have been examining. It is a statement of the function of philosophy and warrants further consideration later as such. But for Gentile it must somehow be distinguished from a presupposition if "presuppositionless philosophy" is to be more than a self-contradictory phrase. As will be shown later, the Theory of Types may profitably be applied to this situation.

The situation is also exemplified in a second instance. The ontological valuation of the unity of the act of thinking is the nearest approach to a presupposition in all of Gentile's philosophy.[5] Indeed the distinction between such an interpreta-

[4] Although in the strict sense in which we are at the moment employing that word any doctrine of external relations involves an entity or entities "presupposed," there is a sense in which this is not a defensible description of the situation. This is an exceedingly important point. Gentile does not give it sufficient attention. We neglect it now only to reserve it for later discussion See pp. 180–1 and 199–200 of this study.

[5] See the *Sistema,* Vol. I, pp. 186–91, and Vol. II, Part III, Chapter VI.

tion of the real and a presupposition is so fine and at the same time so important as to be most instructive. If we ask why there may be a synthesis of the abstract synthesis, as there is in the logic of the concrete, when there may not be an analysis of the abstract analysis we receive no definite answer. Gentile's objection to an analysis of the analysis in the logic of the abstract is that the elements found in that analysis have meaning only in the whole.[6] This analysis has meaning as such only when the analyzed parts are synthesized. But the same argument turned in the other direction might hold against the synthesis of the synthesis. Has not the concrete synthesis meaning as such only when the synthesized parts are analyzed? This is a point which Gentile seems to overlook.[7] The reason why Gentile is not willing to turn the argument in the other direction is that his interpretation of "reality" as the *totality* of the thinkable will not allow it. If one refers to the "real" as a totality the unity is, as one would expect, valued at the expense of the multiplicity. It has been said that this interpretation of the meaning of "reality" arose immediately out of the interpretation of the function of philosophy as that science which thinks all things *in their unity*. These last three words lend ontological significance to "all things"; "all things," each one of which is considered by itself as a part, is a concept quite different from "all things" *in their unity*. We come to what is a most important point in the interpretation of actual idealism when we realize that it is only this tracing of the problem back to the determination of the function of philosophy that will allow Gentile's emphasis upon the unity of the real to escape the charge that it is a presupposition. When Gentile speaks of presuppositions he appears to be referring to that which involves the *Logos,* that is he seems to be concerned only with presuppositions which might affect our char-

[6] See p 65 of this study.
[7] See the fifth criticism made in this chapter, pp. 159–60.

acterization of the norm of thinking. But of course there are other "presuppositions" in philosophy. When the philosopher commences his researches he must make initial interpretations of certain basic concepts, "truth," "reality," and "philosophy" itself, which consist of assumptions (so-called to differentiate them from Gentile's "presuppositions") as to what presumably he is doing. It can probably be argued with profit that these initial assumptions are different from that which ultimately makes the truth true and the false erroneous. In other words these initial assumptions, essential to any philosophy, do not dictate the nature of the *Logos* and for this reason do not involve the Gentilian presuppositional. They define the nature of "truth," that we may recognize it, but do not provide the norm by which "truth" is given value. For example, the definition of truth as transcendent (an assumption) leaves open the important choice of a norm: both Plato and Aristotle gave "truth" the same basic definition but their norms are widely different. This distinction, of which more will be said later, is nowhere brought out in the *Sistema di logica.* But it is necessary if certain of Gentile's statements are to receive exact and serious consideration.

Hence our first major criticism of the *Sistema di logica.* It does not define accurately the concept of a "presupposition" which it employs so fundamentally, and thus neglects an element in actual idealism that is essential to the correct understanding of that philosophy. If there is a legitimate distinction between the determination of the function of philosophy and the determination of the *Logos,* Gentile nowhere recognizes it. If there is not, his search for a presuppositionless philosophy is both confusing and open to telling criticism. Strictly speaking Gentile has been enabled to avoid presuppositions only if that word is given a limitation of meaning which is neither suggested by its usage nor supplied by the author. For the time being we shall leave open the question as to whether or not

it may be inferred from the material of the context in the manner indicated in the preceding paragraph.

Let us now turn to a more direct consideration of the subject of this study. An adequate criticism of Gentile's idealism must conduct two major investigations. In the first place, does Gentile in the *Sistema di logica* build validly upon the foundation of the act of thinking? Is he able to develop a universal and necessary truth thereupon? And in the second place, what has he gained when he has developed this system? Does it fulfill the requirements of a philosophy, or is it so highly specialized in the realm of the ultimate as not to satisfy the demands which may properly be made of any philosophy? The first of these inquiries we shall endeavor to carry out in the remainder of this chapter: to the second we shall devote all of the chapters that follow.

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As its name implies, the logic of the abstract is an abstraction, a study of a part only of a more significant whole. It gives the structure of thinking considered as *pensiero pensato*. It is a circular instrument, expressive simply of the identity of subject and predicate. It furnishes no progress in knowledge, unless knowledge be conceived according to Plato's simile of the bird in the bird-cage. Such a knowledge is that provided by such systems as Euclidean geometry. Gentile rejects this conception. An abstract system depends for its value upon the value of immediately accepted postulates. Ultimate value is supplied, if at all, from elsewhere. For Gentile ultimate value is supplied by the logic of the concrete. Hence the logic of the abstract is in itself nothing. Its value rests in the logic of the concrete, and in answering our first question, regarding the necessary and universal truth value of the Gentilian logic, we shall therefore examine exclusively the logic of the concrete.

Necessity, universality and value are all contained there if anywhere, when they are employed in the Gentilian sense.

But we cannot leave the logic of the abstract without some discussion of it *per se,* for it does suggest two items of interest. One remarks quickly the difference between the abstract structure outlined by Gentile and that outlined by contemporary workers in the field of relational logic. This difference must be explained. It is the function of logic to express the structure of thought in symbols more exact than ordinary language usage. There are two types of abstract logic corresponding to two widely separate interests in thought structure.[8] They are the noetic and the relational logics. Relational logic is non-philosophic. It proceeds by empirical and inductive methods to extract from the symbolism of ordinary language another symbolism which shall so exhibit a deductive systematization that thought and the systems in which it is found may be tested for contradictions. The empirical and inductive nature of this inquiry indicates that the structure of relational logic does not express the essence of the structure of thought. It substitutes for the informal symbolism of language an exact symbolism which allows more precise expression. On the other hand, noetic logic is philosophic in that it enters the field of metaphysics and epistemology. It is an *a priori* investigation into the essential nature of thought structure. It seeks to discover that structure which thought-as-object must exhibit. It is the Gentilian position that the essence of thought structure is the unification of subject and predicate elements in an identity-relation, governed by the three principles, in which the subject is universalized and made necessary by the predicate. In its broadest interpretation it would be difficult to disagree with this position. It does not contradict either relational logic or any other correction of the

[8] For a more detailed discussion of the relation between these two logics see the present author's "Classical and Relational Logic" in *The Philosophical Review* of May, 1936, Vol. XLV, No. 3.

classical from the relational point of view, any more than the chemist's description of a suspension bridge is contradicted by the description of it given by the civil engineer. The relational logician does not attempt the philosophic question: and the noetic logician is not concerned with the development of thought as a precise instrument. The relational logician studies language in connection with the thought it is intended to convey and improves upon it: the noetic logician studies thinking to discover the nature of the process. One need not be alarmed at the Aristotelian character of the Gentilian logic of the abstract: Aristotle's logic is inadequate and awkward for the expression of a non-contradictory system, but it does possess the virtue of expressing the essence of thought structure.

The second point in connection with the logic of the abstract *per se,* and the one which holds the more serious criticism, has to do with Gentile's treatment of the *Principle of Excluded Middle.* He says that it follows from this principle that it is impossible for Being not to be thought.[9] If the identity $A=A$ were not affirmed it would be necessary according to the *Principle of Excluded Middle* to affirm that $A=Not\text{-}A$. So much is clear. But Gentile argues further that since the identity $A=A$ is the essence of *pensiero pensato,* to deny it would be, according to this principle, to deny the reality of thought. This we cannot do. Hence the being of $A=A$ cannot be denied, which is another way of saying that the being of thought cannot be denied. This argument is not so clear. Gentile introduces the concept of Being where it is not relevant. The identity $A=A$, while it represents the mediacy of *pensiero pensato,* affirms nothing about the metaphysical existence of thought. Therefore to deny it is not equivalent to denying the mediacy of Being. The *Principle of Excluded Middle* is of the same order as the *Principle of Identity,* not (as Gentile asserts) more

[9] For this entire argument see the *Sistema,* Vol. I, pp. 162–5.

fundamental. Both express the nature of thought considered as its own object. In and for themselves, without the logic of the concrete, they would have to be considered as presuppositions (or postulates), according to the logical tradition. In and for themselves they prove nothing; they act as demonstrations, but as demonstrations of that which is already presupposed. This is the nature of the logic of the abstract according to Gentile's own description. Hence he falls into an inconsistency in offering one of its principles as a final proof of the non-existence of that which is not mediate (i.e. that which is not thought). He forgets that there are two mediations in his logic. There is first the mediation of the logic of the abstract, whereby the subject is always the subject of the predicate and *vice versa*. And secondly there is the mediation of the logic of the concrete, whereby Ego and Not-Ego are necessary each to the other. To argue about the nature of reality from the former would be to invoke the methodological difficulty that nothing of which anyone has thought has been anything but a mediation of the first type. But a methodological difficulty may not legitimately be made into an ontological argument.[10] Gentile is right in saying that if $A=Not\text{-}A$ were established it could not be thought except as an identity repulsing its negation ($A=A$) and that the confusion which would result would exclude all possibility of logic. But surely this is an argument in a circle which, though characteristic of abstract logic, gives no necessary or universal truth about the nature of reality.

We are now in a position to make a second major criticism of the *Sistema di logica*. From the nature of *pensiero pensato* as an abstract mediation there does not follow an ontological principle regarding the mediacy of Being. The nature of *pensiero pensato* does not legislate the nature of Being until some connection between thought and Being has been established.

[10] See the following chapter for a criticism of this same ontological argument used in connection with the Ego.

And there is nothing in the logic of the abstract which can establish this connection. But this criticism does not affect the general procedure of the logic of the abstract: it concerns only what is a digression from that logic. In itself the logic of the abstract is simply a description of thought considered as object. It is a valid description, though not preferable in all respects to any other. Relational logic, for example, is preferable as an instrument for testing the validity of thinking.

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The transition from the logic of the abstract to the logic of the concrete is difficult. The logic of the abstract in itself is presuppositional; it is a judgment of identicals which leads back to the starting place. Only in the concrete act of thinking does thought progress. The *Logos* must be found in this act if at all. Does Gentile succeed in finding it there? This is the problem with which we are most concerned. Whence the dialectic expressed in the fundamental law, *Ego=Not-Ego?*

By way of contrast, let us examine first the fundamental principles of the logic of the abstract. Thought considered objectively is found to possess a structure of which identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle are the legislative characteristics. If this were all there could be no philosophy because there would be no thought progress, unless philosophy is simply the rational exposition of intuition and hence its handmaid. We would always move in circles of deduction. These three principles not only limit thought to the presupposed, but in relation to the act of thinking about them they are themselves presupposed. They give the character of thought considered as object. Why, then, if they give the character of thought does that character not legislate for the act of thinking by which they are thought? There are two answers to this question: the first is the strict answer prompted by the

Gentilian definition of true knowledge, and the second involves an appeal to that element of progress in human thinking which it would seem difficult to explain if the contrary answer were given.

As regards the first answer, if the character of *pensiero pensato* were to legislate for *pensiero pensante* we should have no way of determining the truth of the former. Thinking when considered objectively takes on an entirely different and abstract character, which makes its principles inapplicable to active thinking, just as the flower when dissected is quite different from the flower growing in a field. Since *pensiero pensato* transcends *pensiero pensante* (i.e. must, like all objective entities, be thought as transcending *pensiero pensante*) it cannot supply a norm which is the *norma sui* of *pensiero pensante*. To take it as a norm would constitute a return to the Parmenidean position in which thought is confronted with an unexplained and inexplicable Being (*pensiero pensato,* in this case). From a disinterested point of view, of course, there is no necessary cause for alarm in such a situation. If this is the whole story, and it must be according to most definitions of true knowledge, the sceptics are right and there is no universal and necessary truth; certainly there is none in the Gentilian sense. Thought simply moves in circles logically and metaphysically speaking. Gentile rejects this solution of the logical and metaphysical problem strictly because he does not think this is the whole story, because he thinks he can legitimately set other and more significant requirements for truth which will allow him to avoid scepticism.

What is the rest of the story as Gentile understands it? Let us try to retell it in our own words. The act of thinking describes a definite progress in which two different elements enter, called by him in accordance with the idealistic tradition, the "Ego" and the "Not-Ego." Whereas in the logic of the abstract he started with an identity of two

terms which had meaning only in the identity, in the concrete situation he starts with a difference of two terms which have meaning only in the expression of the difference. This is the fundamental statement of the fact that we cannot think without thinking something. The act of thinking thinks something which is not the act of thinking but the material of it. Hence it asserts that something is thought, but in doing so it must at the same time assert itself as the act of thinking by which the thought is thought. The dialectic is thus produced. The important element in this dialectic is its progress. Each act of thinking becomes the material for a new act of thinking. The resultant series is both self-developing and infinite. Each thought so alters the spiritual situation that the next act of thinking must, by virtue of it, be an entirely new act. For example, the concept of a poem is not static but rather progressive and infinite. The poem is not a spatial object printed in a book, the same for all readers; it is a meaningful thing which changes from one year to another as it takes its place in a more and more mature ideology. It even changes from one reading to another. One reading of it becomes part of the next reading by virtue of the self-conscious subjective element. This experience with what we habitually and obtusely call unchanging objects is known to all of us, but seldom understood in its full significance. It is according to this mode of development that Gentile pictures the reality of the thinking act. We never step twice into the same river; indeed we are never twice the same to step two times into the river. We ourselves are in a state of flux. It is with this account of the nature of thinking that Gentile attempts to avoid the Parmenidean *impasse*.

If the dialectic of concrete thinking is once established as true by the act of thinking in attempting to establish it, the balance of the logic of the concrete follows without question. That balance is nothing more or less than an elaboration of

the dialectic principle, which gives a new meaning to the customary concepts of logic. Though the terminology employed in the logic of the concrete is exceedingly difficult, the doctrine which it expresses may be rendered more simply. Gentile's characteristic words are "autogenesis," *"autonoema,"* "autosyllogism," "autosynthesis," "autoconcept," etc. Their derivation is clear. The use of the prefix gives expression to the idea that thinking is creative of the world. Since the act of thinking is the only real, since there is nothing presupposed to it, it must itself be productive of all of the material of thought; of the *noema,* of the syllogism, of the synthesis, and of the concept, *in a strictly logical sense.*[11] The act of thinking must be productive of this material, since metaphysically speaking there is nothing else which could produce that matter. As soon as one supposes an entity external to thought which might produce it one destroys the Gentilian conditions for a universal and necessary truth. In the use of these terms in the logic of the concrete Gentile seems to be following where his metaphysical and logical doctrine leads, though the reader will often be justified in believing that that logic might have been described with more simplicity. At present we are only interested in establishing the fact that he is following that lead correctly.

In order to establish this point each of Gentile's three criteria of truth must be applied to the establishment in the *Sistema di logica* of the foundational concept of the logic of the concrete.[12] In doing this we must inquire not simply into the truth of the assertion of the dialectic principle, *but into the truth of the dialectic itself.* The former inquiry would involve the *norma sui* character of the dialectic in general: the latter is concerned with the *norma sui* character of every assertion. We shall find this distinction to be of the greatest impor-

[11] This qualification is extremely important. Its significance is discussed in Chapter IX of this study.

[12] See pp. 35–6 of this study.

tance.[13] The first criterion of truth set by Gentile is that of *necessity*. Is the dialectic necessary? A necessary knowledge is one measured by a *Logos* which gives it necessity regardless, as we found when we examined this question, of the transcendence or immanence of that *Logos*. The *Logos* upon which Gentile relies is the dialectic immanent in the act of thinking. When one thinks (as one must) will this thinking be necessary? The nature of the necessity given by the Gentilian *Logos* is different from that which is ordinarily considered to be the nature of necessity. It is the necessity that the act of thinking be unable under the circumstances to think anything else. It is the recognition that when a person thinks anything he thinks it to the best of his ability. If the best of his ability recommended another possible assertion as true, that would be the one he would affirm. *This necessity may not be denied: the very denial of it would be an assertion of it, for the denial would have to be necessary in order to carry weight.* In other words, anyone who endeavors to deny that assertions contain their own necessity is himself making an assertion which ultimately (and barring the possibility of a transcendent necessity) can possess necessary value only of that kind which it is attempting to deny. The possibility of a transcendent necessity is barred, as we have seen, because being transcendent it is not necessary at all but purely arbitrary. Gentile's opponent is caught in a perfect trap. No assertion that anyone can state may boast a necessity which is not ultimately dependent upon the necessity immanent in the assertion itself. Any attempt at denial defeats itself. Hence *pensiero pensante* fulfills the requirement that it be necessary in the Gentilian sense.

The discussion of this criterion introduces, however, a third major criticism of the *Sistema di logica*. In the logic of the concrete the necessity of the dialectic is described as two-

[13] See the following paragraph.

fold.[14] In the first place, it is the necessity that the act of thinking think something different from the act itself which shall constitute its material. The act of thinking which asserted nothing would be nothing. As Gentile phrases it, this is the necessity of the Not-Ego for the Ego. The Ego by itself is nothing. And secondly, it is the necessity that everything be thought by an act of thinking. That which is not thought is nothing. This is the necessity of the Ego for the Not-Ego, in the Gentilian phraseology. The Not-Ego by itself is nothing. But it should be evident that this two-fold necessity is the necessity of the dialectic *in general,* not of any particular act of thinking. It establishes the necessity that I think something as the material of my every act, plus the necessity that all material be that of some act; hence it gives the general metaphysical foundation of the logic of the concrete. But it does not make it necessary, as it must be if the logic of the concrete is to be established, that any *particular* thought be thought. It does not make it necessary, for example, that "I think virtue is knowledge" as a *specific* assertion be thought. The necessity of this act of thinking on my part is given not by the dialectic nature of the act of thinking in general, but if at all by the recognition that I must necessarily think *this thought* (*pensiero pensato*) if I indeed think it. This is the only necessity that can make that thought true *for me.* If this thought were not necessary *for me* I would not think it. But in expounding the *norma sui* character of *pensiero pensante* Gentile invokes only the former aspect of necessity, the necessity of the dialectic in general, which is impotent alone to fulfill his needs. He therefore fails to establish the truth of *pensiero pensante.* He has established the necessity of the form of *pensiero pensante* but not that of the material of it. We have in the preceding paragraph attempted to complete the task. Whatever

[14] See the discussion of the fundamental law of the logic of the concrete, pp. 86–7 of this study. See also the *Sistema,* Vol. II, pp. 67, 88, 89.

contribution is made therein must be added to the statement in the *Sistema di logica* in defense of the necessity of *pensiero pensante.*

The second criterion of truth is that it be *universal.* Necessity and universality are so related that one is established in the establishment of the other. In what sense is the Gentilian dialectic universal? Is it the same for all men? In a sense it is, because the act of thinking is a necessary act. Insofar as the act of thinking is necessary it follows that it is universal. But in still a wider sense this universality is meaningless. One may not even ask the question as to whether or not the dialectic is the same for all men. Other men exist only in the reality of thought, insofar as they are thought. Hence the real does not contain other men, as we have already seen; it contains thoughts of them. "Other men" are only empirical individuals; even their acts of thought are unreal because they partake of reality only insofar as they are thoughts created (in the Gentilian sense) by the act of thinking which entertains them. In short, one's dialectic is universal not because other men arrive at it independently (if they do!) but because in the freedom of one's thinking (in the Gentilian sense of being free from presuppositions) one is under the necessity of thinking what one thinks. The universality is this, that if another man were in Gentile's position he could not think otherwise. *The very assertion that two men in the same spiritual situation might disagree is, by its nature as an assertion, a denial of this possibility. Every assertion is the assertion of its own universality, or it would not be asserted.* If metaphysics is to be free from presuppositions this is the only universality which knowledge may enjoy. It does not preclude Gentile from writing a *Sistema di logica* any more than it would preclude him from applying the principle of the lever in moving a boulder simply because physics is unreal to him. Even if the not-self is unreal it is necessary to the real.

This is the great point in the dialectic.[15] The universality of the Gentilian truth, being within the act of thinking, carries with it the meaning that the truth for any empirical individual must be found within his act of thinking *and nowhere else.* For Gentile himself there is no truth but that which he finds within; no one else's knowledge can be truth for him, for he so defines truth (in its absence from presuppositions) that only his own act of thinking can give it value. It cannot too frequently be stated that this is a doctrine which is often recognized, but the metaphysical and logical significance of which is seldom considered. One does not accept the thinking of another person as true without oneself performing an act of sanction (symbolized by the "I think . . ." which accompanies every assertion), *which act rather than the thinking of the other person is that which ultimately supplies this universality.*

This problem of universality may be regarded in either of two ways. If an opponent should ask Gentile how he can be certain that the nature of his act of thinking is also the nature of the acts of thinking of others, he might call the question "absurd." Of course it is not an absurd question. What Gentile means is that within his own doctrine he is unable to answer the question because according to that doctrine the thinking of other persons has metaphysical existence only in his own thinking. One may say, then, both that the Gentilian truth is not universal in the usual sense of that word and that it is universal in the very special sense made legitimate by its necessity, the two being obviously interrelated.

In the establishment of both the necessity and the universality of the act of thinking the third criterion of truth is also verified, for in both *pensiero pensante* is given *value.* It is clearly distinguished from a mere objective fact, for it is an assertion. *Any assertion that denied it value would be self-*

[15] See the discussion of this "unreality" in Chapter IX of this study.

*destructive, for being an assertion its whole power is in the value with which the asserter endows it in the act.* But the value is not given by anything objective to thinking. In that case the entity which was objective to thinking would contain the value. It is important to note that our concern here is not with the incomplete logical value assigned by the logic of the abstract. Only concrete value is ultimate. No assertion which anyone can make may have a value which does not rest finally upon this one. The assertions of the materialist for example, do not lack value *for Gentile* because of their inconsistency or "unthinkability." This abstract value depends upon something more fundamental. The thought of the materialist lacks value for Gentile because it cannot be truth *for him* until it is asserted by his own act of thinking, until he himself asserts it as true by a free act. This value is, as we have seen, a moral value, made moral by a situation in which thinking is bound by nothing but its own act with its inherent *Logos*.

The consideration of these three criteria as applied to the dialectic establishes its truth so far as actual idealism is concerned. However, one other point in this connection needs discussion. We have seen that the deductive systems of the logic of the abstract gain their value from the value of the dialectic of the logic of the concrete. This point is far from obvious, largely because of the unusual nature of the criterion of value which we have just considered. It is not contended that the logic of the abstract follows deductively once the truth of the logic of the concrete is established, as the propositions of geometry follow upon its initial postulates and axioms. Consider, for example, the syllogism. The conclusion "Socrates is mortal" does not follow from the premises "All men are mortal" and "Socrates is a man" simply because of an axiom in the logic of the concrete which establishes a relation between the terms. The logic of the concrete introduces a subjective

principle which establishes that this syllogism, or any syllogism, is ultimately the assertion of an act of thinking. And it is its concrete nature as an assertion of an act of thinking that gives it truth value. According to the Gentilian requirements it could not otherwise have truth value. The truth of the syllogism about Socrates is contained in the concrete assertion, "I think all men are mortal." In this assertion, so far as I think it, there is contained the assertion that Socrates is among the class of mortals. The abstract form of the syllogism is what it is. Its rigidity is expressed by the principles of *Identity, Non-Contradiction,* and *Excluded Middle.* These are the rules of the deductive process, culled from an examination of thought taken as object. They give validity to thought. But no deduction is ultimately true until its postulates are asserted by virtue of an "I think. . . ." This is the meaning of the statement that the verity of abstract thought is contained in concrete thinking. But the latter would not be able to lend verity to the former if the relation between the "I think . . ." and what is thought were not necessary, universal, and possessed of value. We have tried to show first, that *pensiero pensante* is necessary, and hence that every *pensiero pensato,* being the assertion of *pensiero pensante,* is necessary; secondly, that *pensiero pensante* is universal, and hence that every *pensiero pensato,* being the assertion of *pensiero pensante,* is universal; and thirdly, that *pensiero pensante* has value, and hence that every *pensiero pensato,* being the assertion of *pensiero pensante,* has value. Hence the logic of the concrete, which in itself necessitates that all thoughts be assertions of the act of thinking, makes these thoughts necessarily and universally true.

If the nature of thinking is concrete, it may be asked how we are able to *think* in terms of the abstract in the rational and natural sciences. The answer is that we do not. We only succumb to the idea that we do when we entertain the product

of the act of thinking without realizing that in actuality *pensiero pensato* is but part of *pensiero pensante*. The logic of the abstract describes thought from such a point of view that it sees the result without seeing the action which produces it. It analyzes the deductive procedure, but even that procedure must be given life by the concrete assertion. Even the false syllogism, "All A is B; Some C is A; Therefore all C is B," is true to the asserter until he makes an assertion of its falsity. And, on the other side, the true syllogism about Socrates is false to the man who finds it false until he makes an assertion of its truth. In other words, while we endeavor to apply the three principles of abstract logic, our thinking is true ultimately not by virtue of them but rather by virtue of something upon which they rest logically. And that something is the concrete assertion symbolized by the "I think. . . ." Metaphysically, then, the logic of the abstract is not an accurate description of our thinking. In analyzing thought we find certain abstract relationships, but they are there only insofar as we recognize them by an assertion. It is in this sense that Gentile can say that we do not think in terms of abstract logic. The logic of the abstract comes after the act of thinking; it is immediate,[16] while the act itself is a mediate process. The distinction is that between immediate intuition and mediate thinking, both of which are ordinarily called "thought." The former is thinking insofar as asserted, and hence true to the asserter, but Gentile asks us to bear in mind that such a "thought" in the past (as it must be as material in the logic of the abstract) is a fixed fact which cannot be revitalized by a mediate process and thus given truth value.

We have refrained when possible from employing the Gentilian form of the principle of the logic of the concrete, *Ego*= *Not-Ego*. The use of the Ego to initiate the dialectic leads

[16] We are using this word in the concrete sense, and shall continue to do so. Gentile employs it in the abstract sense also. See p. 146 of this study.

necessarily to one of two insuperable difficulties. Either one starts with an Ego which is presupposed, as it must be if it is the beginning of the series; or one begins with a pseudo-Ego (as Gentile does) which by the act of creating the Not-Ego creates a new Ego which is the only real one. In the first instance one violates the conditions of a presuppositionless logic; in the second, one commences with an entity which is later destroyed as unreal, hence invalidating metaphysically the argument by which one arrives at its destruction. Either path is fatal to the Gentilian idealism, and Gentile by his use of that term leaves himself open to attack from those who do not realize the basic nature of his argument.

This is the fourth major criticism we shall make of the *Sistema di logica.*[17] If Gentile means more by "Ego" than *pensiero pensante* connotes, or more by "Not-Ego" than *pensiero pensato* connotes, his derivation of the logic of the concrete is in error. If he does not mean more in either case he should not employ "Ego" and "Not-Ego," for certainly the connotations of the latter words are different from those of the former. In either case, then, the *Sistema di logica* is open to criticism. But it should be noted that if *pensiero pensante* and *pensiero pensato* are employed the derivation of the logic of the concrete is not open to the same attack. It may be said on the one hand that one commences with *pensiero pensato,* without being forced to characterize it as presupposed. It *is* that with which one commences. Or it may be said on the other hand that one starts with a *pensiero pensante* which creates a *pensiero pensato* and hence leads to the creation of a new *pensiero pensante.* With this latter choice of terms the primary *pensiero pensante* is not a pseudo-concept in the light of the later one; the series is simply expressive of thought as development, the act of thinking being real in the moment of action and being superseded by the new act. *Pensiero pensante* thus exhibits unique metaphysical and logical properties which justify its

[17] See the following chapter of this study for an enlargement of this criticism.

central position in actual idealism. It allows the dialectic upon which the derivation of that doctrine is based without the presupposition necessary to the Ego or to any other metaphysical concept.

There is a fifth major criticism which must be made of the *Sistema di logica.*[18] Gentile speaks of the real as the unity of the thinkable. How does he justify this emphasis upon unity? If the unity is to be concrete (hence real) Gentile himself says that it must contain its particulars.[19] Why, then, emphasize the universals rather than the particulars? In other parts of the *Sistema di logica* Gentile says that there is no legitimate analysis of the analysis in the logic of the abstract,[20] yet he allows the synthesis of the synthesis in the logic of the concrete.[21] It seems impossible to discover a foundation for this partiality. Though a synthesis of the synthesis is possible, it is difficult to understand how there can be a synthesis of the synthesis without at the same time its being a synthesis of an analysis. How could it be a synthesis otherwise than as a synthesis of parts, and if it is a synthesis of parts are not the parts as important as their synthesis? There appears to be no justification for the over-emphasis of the unity. One may say that the whole being a whole is more valuable metaphysically than its parts being parts (as Gentile does in defining the real) but one may not say that the whole *as a whole made up of parts* is more valuable than a part *as a part of the whole.* Probably the origin of this over-emphasis is to be found in the *Ego=Not-Ego* formula for the expression of the dialectic. The Ego is very often employed by idealists to supply a principle of identity for thought which, according to these idealists, could not be found external to thought. But the Ego as a principle of identity is as much a presupposition as any of those others

[18] The implications of this criticism will be found in Chapter IX of this study.
[19] See the *Sistema,* Vol. I, p. 9.
[20] See *Ibid.,* pp. 186 ff.
[21] See the *Sistema,* Vol. I, pp. 190–1; and Vol. II, Chapters VI and VII of Part III.

of which Gentile is afraid. He, perhaps alone among idealists, may not use it. It implies an entity thinking thoughts and supplying their unity. The nucleus of the Gentilian dialectic is found not in the Ego but in the pure act of thinking which creates its own material. At times Gentile recognizes this quite clearly.[22] This is one of the factors that distinguishes actual idealism from all others. The act of thinking strictly considered is a unity, to be sure, but a unity of form and matter. One does not find in it that which lends more value to the unity than to the parts which are unified; either without the other is, according to a principle set by Gentile himself, an abstraction. This is a great fault in the development of the *Sistema di logica.*

The problem which has jeopardized the universality and necessity of the knowledges of previous idealisms has been that of the deduction of the categories. For Gentile the category is the act of thinking. It may be considered in a number of ways, as predicate or as function or as any one of a number of determinations which *pensiero pensante* places upon the material of thought. But fundamentally the category is unique. It has no deduction, for it is given by the act of thinking and hence is not susceptible of deduction. If it were deducible that from which it was deduced would require explanation, and so on *ad infinitum.* The only entity behind which one cannot go is the act of thinking itself, for one could hardly speak of the unique category as being deduced from the act of thinking when that act would be required in the process of making the deduction. The category ceases to be an element or atom in thought, as Aristotle used it. Hence everything knowable reduces to the act of thinking (autosynthesis) as the ultimate category. The category becomes a function, as Kant supposed. But the difference between Kant and Hegel, and Gentile is that while for the former two a deduction of the categories

[22] See Gentile's comments on Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum,* and with regard to the relation of the self to its future; pp. 39 and 197, and p. 53 respectively of Vol. II of the *Sistema.*

was required for the verity of their philosophies, actual idealism needs no such deduction. In fact it is a unique feature of actual idealism that it shows the impossibility of such a deduction. If the categories are to be deduced they must be deduced from something. If that something is not to be presupposed it can be only the self-creative act of thinking. But the act of thinking is the common denominator by which one thinks all that is thinkable, and hence is *the* category. The legitimate development of the Gentilian logic succeeds in removing from discussion one of the classic and most perplexing of philosophic problems.

It will be found characteristic of the Gentilian doctrine that it removes a number of the classic problems from the arena of philosophic argument: the realism-nominalism controversy is another example.[23] This is done in general by a redefinition of these problems. But it is not done by pragmatic methods. It is always performed by *a priori* methods, the problem under consideration being taken as poorly defined not from a practical point of view (like the problem, cited by William James, of the squirrel going "around" the tree and its observers) but from the point of view of the nature of the act of thinking. One might suppose that Gentile, by removing these classic problems from debate, has done one of two things. Either he has put off the evil day when these problems must be faced even if in another form; or his *a priori* considerations have so limited his conception of the function of philosophy that by being enabled to avoid these problems he has emasculated his doctrine. In testing these two suppositions we are confronted with the greatest and the last of the problems with regard to Gentile's doctrine. Having examined the terminology and the system, correcting both where correction seemed necessary, what have we as a result? To various phases of this problem we shall devote the remainder of this study.

[23] See the *Sistema,* Vol. I, pp. 240–1.

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## Chapter Eight

# THE EGOCENTRIC PREDICAMENT

The quest of the philosopher is the quest for certainty. The history of the metaphysics of logic seems to contain exclusively thinkers dependent for certainty upon a norm objective in relation to the act of thinking. The Greek atomists provided certainty in knowledge by a doctrine of the reliability of sensation, which depended upon quantitative stuff and its motions. For Plato truth was found in the realm of Ideas; the certainty being arrived at through the verity of reminiscence. Aristotle developed deductive logic and thus allowed thinking to derive validity from definition and a logical structure based upon the law of non-contradiction. But the ultimate truth criterion was found in the correspondence of judgments with that "known" which transcended the "knower." Modern philosophy has attempted two new logics. The first of these was Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*. His inductive method searches for causes, for facts related to facts, and necessarily takes for granted a cosmos to which the application of this new method will be valid. The second was the logic of the synthesis *a priori*. In Kant the system of the categories lent verity to a knowledge of phenomena. And in Hegel the Absolute as a metaphysical concept lent verity to the dialectic logic. In other words, one stimulus to metaphysical investigation seems to have been the point of view that thinking in itself cannot have truth or falsity, that value depends upon some norm previous to the act of thinking. The search for a foundation upon which to build logical principles has always been a task of primary importance to the metaphysician.

Hence the uniqueness of actual idealism. In basing its logic upon a norm inherent in the act of thinking it has shown recognition of a predicament prominent in contemporary philosophical discussion, which has come to be known as the "egocentric predicament." Careful study of the problem which it raises has led most philosophers to describe it as a methodological predicament and therefore less significant than it is generally considered to be by those metaphysicians whose doctrines take their beginning from it. The argument which leads to this description is authoritatively presented by Mr. R. B. Perry. Although actual idealism is a metaphysical solipsism the main tenet of which is clearly criticized by Mr. Perry, no attempt is made in the *Sistema di logica* to meet his argument. The wide acceptance of Mr. Perry's study makes it imperative that an answer to it be attempted in the name of actual idealism if the latter is not to be summarily rejected. Probably no other criticism of ontological idealism in recent years has been so effective.

Let us begin by stating the argument by which Mr. Perry's criticism proceeds. It should readily be admitted that the argument has so much force that if the author be allowed to set the stage as he has set it, his conclusions follow necessarily. It must therefore receive critical examination in its very inception or criticism will be futile. Mr. Perry says that "ontological idealism . . . is a name for the proposition (E) $R^c$ defines (T)," where E (or Ego) is made to stand for the personal pronoun, $R^c$ means any form of consciousness that relates to an object, and T refers to anything and everything.[1] This is probably an accurate definition of most ontological idealisms. However to assert that this is also a description of actual idealism may be open to question for reasons which we must consider carefully. What is meant by "anything and every-

[1] "The Ego-Centric Predicament" (*Jour. of Phil, Psych, and Sci, Methods*, Vol. VII, 1910, No. 1), p. 6.

thing"? The phrase has two metaphysical connotations which must be treated separately. In the first place, it may mean any and all entities considered as objective to the knowing process and susceptible of being known. Such are the entities studied by every possible science except that of metaphysics as defined by Gentile. Gentile must agree with Mr. Perry that these entities as objects should be studied independent of their thought relation to the knower, and that all arguments which try to employ the predicament in rendering an acquaintance with these objects is false. In the second place, however, "anything and everything" may be part of the act of knowing. As act rather than fact it no longer refers to entities or terms, but to a function. In this case no more than the other is it defined by (E) $R^c$ (T), but for a reason quite different than that given by Mr. Perry's argument. It cannot be spoken of as being defined by its relation to the Ego, or by its relation to the act of knowing interpreted in any way, *because it is itself the act of knowing*. It should be clear that Mr. Perry's argument applies only to doctrines defined by the symbols in which he sets up the predicament. More specifically, the use in itself of terms and relations in the description of an ontological judgment (as in Mr. Perry's formula) involves the presupposition of the separation of the Ego, the act of consciousness, and the entities to be known by that act. The argument is a perfect example of the circular procedure which is characteristic of the logic of the abstract, wherein the answer to the problem is found in the conditions according to which the problem is stated. Mr. Perry states the problem in terms of external relations and proceeds to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the argument for internal relations. Human thinking is so fallible that clear and undeniable arguments of this type are contributions of value in the accurate elaboration of philosophic concepts. The application of Mr. Perry's argument to all of those who accept his premises, which includes most onto-

logical idealists, is both valid and important. But Gentile shows that these premises are in themselves open to question.

Royce has pointed out that Mr. Perry's treatment of the problem as one to which the canons of induction are applicable is open to question. Nevertheless Mr. Perry has demonstrated that a methodological characteristic of the process of knowing does not import an ontological significance. This is his contribution to the study of the predicament, and is quite independent of his statement of the problem. In other words, if the idealist can only show that no entity can be entertained outside of the thought relation, he has not by that fact established an ontological principle. In order to establish one he must show that the fact has an ontological significance. In the case of Gentile the fact gains ontological significance when it is pointed out that the only possible presuppositionless *Logos* is the act of thinking by which all objective entities are thought. In this case, there is an emphasis not upon a methodological difficulty *as such* but rather upon the act of thinking as the ontological basis of a universal and necessary and valuable knowledge.

This point must be made clear. Although Gentile argues in the logic of the abstract that the relation $R^c$ is peculiarly indispensable to every entity, this argument does not hold.[2] His best argument comes from the logic of the concrete. Reality being defined as the totality of the thinkable, and true thought being characterized as necessary, universal, and possessing value, it follows that the only reality that can be known *truly* is the act of thinking which is *norma sui.* If he had only argued that whatever reality is known must be entertained as thought he would be subject to Mr. Perry's criticism. But he starts not from the universal predicament of human beings in their effort to know about a world of which they have direct apprehension only through their thoughts, but from a funda-

[2] See pp. 145–7 of this study.

mental concept of the nature of *true* knowledge (not simply knowledge, as that of the natural sciences). There may be entities independent of the process of knowing, and indeed Gentile must agree that there probably are,[3] but we cannot know them with philosophic certainty (i.e. universally and necessarily) according to Gentile. We can know them abstractly (i.e. as objects), and it is this knowledge that the other sciences give us. This latter knowledge is based upon immediate intuition (presuppositions): its very entertainment in his thinking is evidence that Gentile finds the predicament at least unsafe as an ontological argument. This point is extremely important. From among our "thoughts" Gentile distinguishes those arrived at by mediate acts of thinking from those arrived at by immediate intuition. That he takes the former as real and the latter as abstractions demonstrates that he does not base his ontology on the predicament, for if he did it should be clear that so far as the predicament alone is concerned both would have to be real. Actual idealism asserts that reality is thinking not because of a predicament but because of an interpretation of "philosophic knowledge"; it does not even proceed *via* the predicament. Thinking is the sole reality not because all entities must be thought, but because only in the act of thinking is Gentile able to find a final and unconditioned norm (or *Logos*) which will give a concrete (philosophic) assertion value. The act of thinking is retained not because it is the only thing within reach: immediate intuitions are equally accessible. The act of thinking is retained because it alone, according to Gentile, is that which the philosopher is seeking. The very soul of actual idealism is the doctrine that the logical search for the ultimate norm of thought ends in metaphysics and that the metaphysical search for the real ends in logic.[4]

Of the three types of idealism outlined by Mr. Perry, actual

[3] See Chapter IX of this study.

[4] See pp. 34–5 and 94–5 of this study.

idealism has elements in common with each. According to Mr. Perry's terminology, in one E creates T; according to the Gentilian terminology the act of thinking creates all entities thought as objective to it. Again using Mr. Perry's terminology, in another E organizes T; in Gentile's terminology the act of thinking organizes all entities thought as objective to it. Finally, in the third, E is identical with T; the act of thinking is identical with all entities thought as objective to it. If, ontologically speaking, there is nothing outside of the act of thinking, these three conclusions must follow. Gentile establishes them by means of the ultimate identification of metaphysics and logic. But in another sense it is only fair to add that actual idealism has certain distinctive elements which differentiate it from the three types of idealism criticized by Mr. Perry. It is our task at the moment to discover what these elements are. One of them concerns the use of the word "Ego." Perhaps Gentile would agree with Mr. Perry's conviction that philosophers are all too ready "to assert anything of consciousness": [5]

> It would appear that there is no conception too paradoxical to be harbored there. The proposition, gold is gold, is redundant, and the proposition, blue is its own other is nonsense; but the propositions, I am I, and, the self is its own other, somehow pass for intelligible discourse. Similarly, while a planetary system which is identical with each planet and prior to them, is clearly a doubtful proposition, men nod their heads when they hear of a self which can dispense with its own parts, and also be wholly present to each of them. So long as the self remains obscure and unanalyzed, loosely denoted by such terms as "I," "Ego," or "subject," it will doubtless afford a refuge for logical lawlessness.

While Gentile is often guilty of the charge here made, he too is dissatisfied with the use of the word "Ego." Consider a passage from the *Sistema di logica* in which the immediate Ego is negated in its passage through the Not-Ego to the synthesis.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

This immediate Ego, it should be noted, is exactly the Ego against which Mr. Perry is arguing. In speaking of the identity, *Ego=Ego,* Gentile says:[6]

> The former is the Ego which is not Ego; and is therefore natural being, that *obscure* and *evanescent* being which every man feels in the depths of his spirit, and which he calls . . . temperament or nature. . . . *Nothing,* in truth. For if we wish to know this nature for what it is, how can we do so? . . . Natural being, known as such, could only be known without the aid of thinking. *It is nothing.*

Thus the Ego which initiates the dialectic process is an unreal entity, an abstraction quite as much as any other presupposed entity. So far Gentile goes. But does he go far enough? What about the concrete Ego? Is it not obscure and evanescent also?

Mr. Perry has been quoted at length at this point because he expresses a truth which all idealism needs to consider seriously. It suggests once more a criticism of actual idealism set forth in its elements in the preceding chapter.[7] We shall now endeavor to follow that criticism to its conclusion. So long as Gentile's idealism is considered to be egocentric it is faced with the insuperable difficulty (certainly insuperable within Gentile's basic assumptions) of explaining the initial presence of the Ego. Are the Ego and its close relative, the Not-Ego, essential to actual idealism? If so they will surely be found untenable because neither can escape its character as a presupposition even though Gentile does not recognize this. If actual idealism is to be tenable certain alterations, which will dislodge "Ego" and "Not-Ego" from their key positions, must be made. Can we make these alterations and still express the metaphysical doctrine basic to Gentile's philosophy? This is the problem we must now investigate.

The Ego first enters the Gentilian expression of the system of actual idealism in approaching the logic of the concrete

[6] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 55. Italics mine.

[7] See p. 158 of this study.

through that of the abstract. If it can be forced to retreat from that entrenchment perhaps it can be defeated altogether without killing the doctrine behind it. It is first used to express the spirituality of the object in the logic of the abstract.[8] We have seen that according to Gentile logic commences when nature is idealized in the identity-relation, becomes thought, "and finally responds to thought, saying, 'I am nature' ": [9]

It responds as nature, calling itself such: but responds by using that great word, "I," without which it could not respond and something else would have to respond for it. The abstract *Logos* could not do this. . . .

because of the nature of the logic of the abstract as the expression of an identity in the object: [10]

It is necessary, then, that the object speak. . . . It speaks, as anyone can: it posits itself by expressing itself, making itself knowledge by means of what it says, and making itself knowledge through that which it is in making itself speak. It mirrors itself in its discourse, and hence reveals itself.

To whom does it reveal itself? He who speaks reveals himself to others and to himself, but he would not reveal himself to others if he did not first reveal himself to himself. . . . This speaking to oneself and thus recognizing oneself, is the reflection proper to the Ego, whose only significance is this internal remirroring of itself, not to the eyes of others but to its own. . . . The abstract *Logos*, opposite to or object of the Ego, is nothing but the Ego itself. $A=A$ can only be *Ego=Ego*. The object of thought, if it is not to be inaccessible to thought but rather clear and intelligible, must be the subject itself of thought.

And the Ego takes its place in the doctrine. But what is the central thought here? And is the Ego essential to it? It is that nature, in itself and not idealized by becoming thought, is not knowable. By "nature," of course, is meant any object

[8] See the *Sistema,* Vol II, p. 17; also p. 79 of this study.
[9] *Sistema,* Vol. II, pp. 17 and 18.
[10] *Ibid.,* pp. 18 and 18–9.

of thinking. However it may seem such, this is not the expression of a methodological difficulty; it is the expression of the logical fact that any object in itself and not idealized is given in advance of thought and therefore neither logically nor metaphysically founded. But it seems to be sheer fancy for Gentile to expand this into a statement that nature responds to thought with the "I am nature." The basic idea is equally well expressed by saying that nature, being an object of thought, is made such by an act of thinking. It is given metaphysical and logical significance by the act of thinking which entertains it. To express this by means of the fairy story that the identity $A=A$ becomes $Ego=Ego$ is simply to raise unnecessary difficulties in the path of actual idealism. Not only does this "Ego" become lost in obscurity under persistent examination, but it does not express accurately what Gentile is trying to say.

The introduction of the Ego at this point leads to the logic of the concrete, for it places us in possession of an entity which requires its contradictory in order to be realized: [11]

> It is evident that an Ego without an object is itself an abstraction, identically the same abstraction as the abstract *Logos;* because only by mediating itself does the Ego objectify itself. If it did not objectify itself it would be a pure immediate; that is, a simple object, an $A=A$, which supposes the Ego. . . .

What Gentile is saying here is that thought without its object is immediate, an object of thought which itself requires an act of thinking. Thus in passing from the logic of the abstract to that of the concrete, according to Gentile, the Ego which is introduced to express the idealization of nature must (being Ego) give birth to its object, the Not-Ego.[12] In more simple language this means nothing more, or should mean nothing more, than that the realization of the act of thinking requires the introduction of that which the act of thinking thinks: when we think we must think something. Up to the present point we

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

have been able to express Gentile's doctrine more accurately than he does himself by substituting "act of thinking" for "Ego." The term "Ego" implies a thinking personality; what Gentile should endeavor to stress is the *thinking* and not the *personality,* for it is the thinking that is central to his doctrine. He probably does not mean to say that there is an initial personality the self-awareness of which is the beginning of the dialectic. Such an entity would be the empirical individual, which he finds as unreal as all other abstractions. If there were this initial personality it would have to be presupposed, for thinking would find its origin in it. On the other hand, if "Ego" is replaced by "act of thinking" the new concept not only expresses the idealization of nature, but at the same time is a concept which is in itself and is not presupposed, because it *is* thinking. That this act of thinking requires its opposite (i.e. object) in order that it be realized is also evident, although even the use of the word "opposite" is obscure in this connection.

In the full expression of the logic of the concrete its fundamental law is given by the form, *Ego=Not-Ego.* In spite of the tradition already behind this symbolism it certainly has extremely unfortunate features. No more fortunate is the concrete interpretation of *Ego=Ego.* Let us commence with the latter. In explaining it Gentile makes the important distinction between thinking a thing and thinking a person.[13] A thing is what it is, a chair is a chair, and cannot be anything else. But a person is the subject of the activity which we identify with him. He is always changing, always becoming new; we shall always err in judging him because we must judge him according to his past: [14]

But just this is his being, his not being that which he will be—the actuality of this not being. He is a need and a desire for being, a

[13] *Ibid.,* p. 52.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

burst toward being. . . . The Ego is this being which is not, but is by virtue of not being. . . .

On the face of it an idea such as this one is difficult to express with less confusion. The confusion seems to be inherent in the idea and not due simply to the mode of expression. However a change in expression ought, in this case, to be helpful. The import of this passage is that the concrete meaning of *Ego*= *Ego* involves a difference rather than an identity. But if it expresses a difference it would seem more fitting to use another symbolism for it. Gentile himself suggests the use of "Ego makes itself Ego," which is an improvement in that it eliminates the meaningless equality sign.[15] But it does not go far enough. Consider for a moment just what Gentile means by a "person." He does not mean the empirical individual, for the empirical individual is what he is as much as any unconscious organism or object. It is the awareness which makes self-creation possible that Gentile is trying to emphasize. Ontologically speaking the person as an individual is nothing, and his thinking as awareness is not the awareness of self as individual, but rather of self as thought. This is the meaning of the *Cogito ergo sum* as Gentile interprets it.[16] I think therefore *thinking* is. In terms solely of thought the expression "Ego makes itself Ego" becomes an expression of the dialectic of thought whereby the act of thinking thinks something, which two elements are synthesized in the new act of thinking and produce the new *pensiero pensato,* and so on through an infinite development. Thinking is self-awareness, and correctly understood as such if "self" is taken not to imply personality or individuality but rather a reflexive function. Thinking is unique in this self-awareness or reflexiveness; this is the important point. Nothing else of which we know is both subject and object. It would be like a serpent swallowing itself, if the serpent could do so indefinitely, growing and developing by feed-

[15] See, for example, *Ibid.,* Vol. I, pp. 54 ff. [16] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, p. 57.

ing on itself. It is this self-awareness of thinking that makes the dialectic possible. Perhaps the mistake on Gentile's part is in supposing that there cannot be self-awareness without the Ego. But certainly thinking can turn back on itself, *pensiero pensato* can become the material of a new *pensiero pensante,* which is all that is required.

Turn now to a consideration of the fundamental law of the logic of the concrete, *Ego=Not-Ego.* The contradiction expressed here is the very life of thinking, the realization of the act of thinking through that which is thought. But whence the equality sign, again? Gentile does not actually mean that the Ego is equal to the Not-Ego; he means that there cannot be Ego without Not-Ego, and not Not-Ego without Ego. He is expressing the dialectic principle of the logic of the concrete. He means that the Ego through the realization of the Not-Ego becomes by synthesis the new Ego in preparation for the new synthesis. Thus there are two Egos, as we have seen: [17]

> . . . The Ego can be taken in two significances; either as the unity of the opposed Ego and Not-Ego (and then the Not-Ego is the content of the Ego as one of its moments), or as one of the two opposites in which the Ego is dualized (that is, as the antithesis of the Not-Ego, that original term from which thought must alienate itself in order to think).

The second of these two was discussed in the paragraph above. Can the first also be expressed in terms of the act of thinking? Inasmuch as *Ego=Not-Ego* is but another way of expressing what was expressed in *Ego=Ego,* it would appear so. The arguments of the last paragraph hold for this one also and need not be repeated.

Our criticism of the Gentilian expression of the dialectic is two-fold. In the first place, we object to the use of a symbol of the abstract logic in the logic of the concrete. The

[17] *Ibid.,* Vol. II, p. 57. See pp. 86–7 of this study.

equality sign has a definite and useful meaning which involves the substitution of one side of the equation for the other in any manipulation. It retains this meaning in the logic of the abstract. It is quite evident that Gentile is not so employing it in the logic of the concrete. The Ego is not *equal to* the Not-Ego. Ontologically speaking the two are necessary the one to the other, but for the expression of this idea a different and perhaps entirely new symbol should be used. And in the second place, we object to the use of the terms "Ego" and "Not-Ego." As a matter of fact there are two "Egos" and they should be more clearly distinguished from each other by the use of two different words if suitable ones can be found. The first Ego is that which is opposed to the Not-Ego. Its essence is the act of thinking, which involves awareness of self not as a personality but as the act of thinking. The "act of thinking" defined as reflexive self-awareness is a more precise expression of this concept than is "Ego," for the latter connotes a presupposed personality. The second Ego is the unity of the Ego and the Not-Ego, the essence of which is the same "act of thinking" involving the same self-awareness. Its only difference from the former is that being a synthesis it involves in itself the Not-Ego, or *pensiero pensato*. It, no more than the first, is indicative of an underlying personality, for this personality would be quite as unaccountable ontologically as the other.

This criticism suggests its own application to all idealistic logic, for this logic has since its inception suffered from an obscurity and confusion of expression which quite justifies Mr. Perry's attack. But we are concerned here only with its application to actual idealism. From one point of view it offers nothing more serious than a suggestion of alteration in terminology. But from another it brings to light a definite contradiction in the *Sistema di logica* between a concept and its context. The context suggests a better terminology, one we have

tried to introduce, the use of which would change that work appreciably. This alteration in terminology would bring consistency, and it would also obviate the elaborate exposition and delimitation of the *Sistema di logica* which is now required. The essence of the "Ego" is thinking; the essence of the "development of a man's spirit" is a thought development. No man as an individual, not even Gentile, is real. It is only the act of thinking which is real; and as such it cannot be attached to an unreal thinker. Hence to speak of my thought or of Gentile's thought or of anyone's thought is to refer to abstract entities.

It must be admitted that the constant reference to these abstract entities, indulged in even by Gentile, is bewildering. But this fault cannot be avoided in the most careful expression of actual idealism, as has been pointed out earlier. An explanation of his use of concepts of these abstract entities is offered by Gentile himself. We cannot write or speak without using them, he says. Even "act of thinking" becomes the concept of an abstract entity abstractly considered unless excessive care is taken to keep its ontological uniqueness in mind. It is not real as an object of thought, but is the act of thinking it as object. Whatever we think becomes objective, *pensiero pensato,* and becoming objective ceases to be real. Hence the inability to avoid much that is misleading in interpreting actual idealism. Any metaphysics that is significant must be interpreted for human living, a function somewhat different from the initial propounding of it. The difficulty seems to be that in the *Sistema di logica* propounding and interpreting are distractingly intermingled.

This strict interpretation of actual idealism, which denies reality to the thinking personality, strikes against at least one considerable difficulty. It seems quite unable to account for the universally recognized fact that thinking is attached to the human empirical individual. Thinking has a relation

to human bodies which it does not have to other empirical individual entities. For Gentile the real man is describable philosophically only in terms of thought; and equally, the real chair is describable only in terms of thought. His position is consistent, to be sure; ontologically speaking and from his point of view, the individual man is not to be distinguished from the individual chair. But we have the most convincing awareness that the act of thinking is some individual's act of thinking, and is given significance as indicating the path along which an individual must go in the solution even of ontological problems. Leibniz realized this inability of solipsism to account for the individual when he said that everything is made up of thinking monads. But in his endeavor to avoid presuppositions this way is not open to Gentile.[18] Modern idealists have avoided the problem by saying that the real entities are individuals (idealistic pluralists) or that there is one final real entity which enfolds all of the others (absolute idealists). But Gentile belongs to neither of these schools; he is left alone. The act of thinking may be the only presuppositionless real, but it is somehow connected with an individual whose identity is preserved by the Ego to which Descartes in fact referred in his *Cogito ergo sum.* There is the suggestion here of a type of criticism of the Gentilian doctrine which will appear more fully in a later chapter of this study. Due to his use of the "Ego" Gentile has been led to neglect the problem as such. We have tried to show that his doctrine should be expressed in other terms. But this alteration introduces the problem again almost immediately.

It has been our contention that the arguments against ontological idealism marshaled by Mr. Perry are not applicable to actual idealism, in the first place because his definition of onto-

[18] Connected with this is the problem of the continuity of consciousness, which the ingenuity of Leibniz helped him to handle, but which seems quite beyond Gentile's power of explanation with the conceptual tools of his metaphysics. See Chapter IX of this study for a fuller discussion of this general problem.

logical idealism excludes the Gentilian variety, and secondly because Gentile in the development of his doctrine is concerned not with a methodological difficulty but with the attainment of a philosophic knowledge according to an unusually strict definition of it. Gentile is concerned chiefly with logic, with the realization that in itself deduction is not a proof of deduced propositions. Relational logicians recognize that in order to give an account of logic we must presuppose and employ logic. It is this predicament, the *logocentric predicament,* rather than the egocentric predicament that is Gentile's concern. The transfer of the important issue of idealism from egocentricism to logocentricism is not new with Gentile. It was brought out very clearly in Royce's last course of lectures on metaphysics: [19]

> Sooner or later, if you are going to take any position about metaphysical questions, you find it necessary to face this matter. There is no more important issue between realism and idealism than this [i.e. that of the relation between existence and essence]. I don't think you get a fair view of idealism if you think of its issue with realism merely in terms of Professor Perry's egocentric predicament. It is not the most important feature of idealism that it appears to be committed to an insistence . . . that the being of things, whether God or man or the physical world, is a being in the mind of some thinker. . . . The really most important feature is exactly the issue here concerned: does the existence of anything make any difference to its essence? does the essence of anything make any difference to its existence? is it any part of the essence of a thing that it exists?

Like Royce's idealism, that of Gentile is logocentric. Hence the great issue between Gentile and the traditional metaphysician brings him, as it brought Royce, against such critical realists as Mr. Santayana. The critical realist agrees epistemologically with the doctrines of the actual idealist but states that in addition to essence, existence must be predicated of the

[19] *Contemporary Idealism in America* (Macmillan, New York, 1932), p. 45.

real in order that it be real. The issue, then, between the two is that of the ontological argument.

While in their acceptance of the ontological argument Royce and Gentile are allied, for the former it is a way of avoiding solipsism while for the latter it is not. For Royce the interplay between essence and existence provides the ontological argument. There is nothing in experience which cannot be taken up into essence; and there is nothing in essence, so far as it is apprehended by mind, which does not tend toward existence. Essence is given by the *interpretation* of the existent. Royce never renounces the point that:[20]

> idealistic metaphysics, like all metaphysics, is concerned with the nature of the objective world, the world of reality; that any approach to reality, however completely it moves in the realm of objects, however "realistic" if you like,—if it is capable of reaching the truth at all, will bring the thinker to the result that the world of the reals is a world of spirit.

On this issue Royce and Mr. Santayana are not so widely separated. For both the *Logos* transcends the act of thinking.

Gentile's attitude toward the ontological argument is much more extreme. His identification of *essence* and *existence* is not on the basis of interpretation. It is his point that a distinction between essence and existence can have no philosophic significance. Indeed the distinction which Gentile makes between his metaphysics and all others', Royce to the contrary notwithstanding, is that they distinguish between the two while he unites them.[21] If there is no reality external to the act of thinking, every essence in the act of being thought is existent. Part of the essence of a horse is that we think of it as having objective existence: part of the essence of a phoenix is that we think of it as mythical in the objective realm. Hence the *actual* character of Gentile's idealism. We cannot hold thought

[20] *Ibid.*
[21] See the *Sistema,* Vol. II, p. 10; and Part III, Chapter IV.

in abeyance. Whenever we suspend judgment that very suspension is an act of thinking. All acts of thinking not only concern the essence of existence but are actually the essence of existence. In such a doctrine essence and existence are inseparable. It should be noted at this point that the critical realist makes a separation between essence and existence in order to provide adequately for the given element in experience. There seems to be a specific unalterability in the cosmos, known to us by its "shocks," which we accept on Mr. Santayana's "animal faith." It is in providing for this givenness that the issue between actual idealism and critical realism rests, and we shall discuss it in Chapter IX of this study. Epistemologically the two move together: metaphysically they are poles apart.

Although the issue between the realist and the actual idealist rests upon grounds other than those of the controversy described by Mr. Perry, the former will not excuse the latter simply because in a final analysis his doctrine is logocentric rather than egocentric. Indeed logocentricism is even farther removed from realism. There is a fundamental point of disagreement between the two. Both agree against the neo-positivist that metaphysics is meaningful, but apparently their interpretations of its meaningfulness differ. The difference is the difference between the "what" and the "that," of which Royce was so fond. The realist's metaphysics is descriptive: it tells *what* the real is. The actual idealist's metaphysics is normative: it tells *that* the real is something. The one offers a description which it recommends as the most fitting description, in one sense or another, of the real. But of any one thing many descriptions are possible, and the realist finds it difficult to show reason why his metaphysical system is better than that of his neighbor. Whatever reason he gives will itself be a metaphysical judgment and, moving in a circle, get him no nearer a conclusive argument. The other, the actual idealist,

says that the real must be what he thinks it to be. He is more decisive, but thereby places on his own shoulders a burden of difficulties few have been willing to carry.

It must be admitted that the realist makes one initial presupposition. He presupposes that the real is independent of the act of thinking. In effect, this seems to be, in part at least, his definition of the real. And he has one very persuasive argument in his defense. He will say that this presupposition is so thoroughly non-committal to an ontology that it is justified. It is non-committal in that it tells nothing about reality except that it is external to thought. But is it non-committal enough? Does not the realist's presupposition determining the independence of the real impose a significant limitation? The idealist has never proved by any deduction of the categories that that which is not thinking must be spatial or temporal, or determined, or anything else of a categorical nature. But he has argued that the act of thinking provides the concepts according to which percepts are thought; in other words he has argued that if there is to be a knowledge at all, the act of thinking contributes to that knowledge. For the realist the real is independent of that act; for the idealist it is created by that act. But to say that the real is independent of the act of thinking is to take an important step. The phenomenon of thinking may be included within the realist's real monistically, dualistically, or pluralistically; but the real will always be a thing set apart from the act of knowing it. The real in this way is given so definite a character that the realist is strictly limited to a metaphysics which is purely descriptive and whose virtue can only be that it is a better description than any other.[22] The arbitrary interpretation of that word, "better," makes all the difference between one traditional metaphysician and another. Descriptions always have perspective, and the

[22] The reader will recognize a perfect example of this phenomenon in Mr. Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*.

perspective of the traditional metaphysician is wholly found in the meaning "better" has for him. Hence the many metaphysical systems, and hence also the impossibility of choosing from among them in a final sense. These metaphysical systems lack necessity. That which is external to thinking can never give a necessary knowledge that the real exhibits uniformity, for example; it can only suggest that a proper and fitting description of the external world is that it is uniform. A persistent examination of "proper and fitting" opens up the entire metaphysical question again. The traditional metaphysician never gets anywhere. He is one of a group of artists sketching from a model. Which of them may say his is the best sketch?

The idealist can safeguard himself against the obvious retort. The realist may not offer in rebuttal the argument that the definition of the real as the totality of the thinkable is equally limiting. The essence of this definition is that it is non-limiting.[23] It necessarily avoids all presuppositions, for anything presupposed in relation to it would change it to a part rather than the whole. The idealist's definition is founded upon a logical principle. The logical principle comes first; and out of that logical principle by definite steps comes the judgment that the real must signify the act of thinking. The precedence of the logical principle that there shall be no presuppositions over the consideration of what the real comes to signify according to that principle makes a great difference. With respect to the present problem it constitutes the justification of the idealistic doctrine of metaphysics.

For this reason the only way in which the realist may offer a case against the actual idealist is to attack the initial logical principle. The one thing that does not appear to enter the comprehension of Gentile in considering the ontological problem is the realization that an argument which questions this principle is possible. The one most effective attack against

[23] See pp. 139–40 of this study.

the principle of the avoidance of presuppositions is simply to deny its superiority. The realist has the right to say that if a metaphysics based upon the strict avoidance of presuppositions leads where the *Sistema di logica* leads, then he does not want it. And he is being perfectly consistent in maintaining this point of view *if* he is willing to concede that metaphysics is a description of the real and that there may be more than one legitimate description of it. His use of "real" is only one among many. He may reject actual idealism because its real is not adequate, because it is not significant, because it is not common sense, or for some other reason. He chooses his meaning for the "real" according to his interpretation of the function of philosophy.

And thus we reach the court of final appeal. The actual idealist may argue day and night that the metaphysics of the realist does not give a necessary and universal knowledge of the real in any but the objective (and therefore limited) sense, but he cannot prevent the realist from being satisfied with a metaphysics that exhibits this character. If we accept the realist's interpretation of the function of philosophy we must necessarily follow him in his interpretation of the function of metaphysics and of the consequent nature of the real. We can only caution him that his interpretation is but one among many. Many artists see different things in the same model. What is important and significant to one is unimportant and insignificant to another. From his point of view the realist must admit the legitimacy of more than one description of the nature of reality. In contrast, there is no corresponding leniency in the metaphysics of Gentile. If one accepts his terminology and his meanings there can be but one metaphysics. Gentile may not have propounded it with complete accuracy, but it contains the possibility of an accurate exposition and that exposition will be unique.

Do not these considerations seriously alter the rôle ascribed

earlier to actual idealism? Realism admits of more than one metaphysics, while actual idealism admits of only one. Is this not in conflict with Gentile's assertion that truth and error are *my* truth and *my* error? This point is most illuminating because as a matter of fact it represents a confirmation of Gentile's position rather than a disproof of it. The realist does not admit more than one *true* metaphysics even though he cannot say which among many *is* true. All men agree that truth must be necessary and universal. And the meaning which the realist gives to "necessary and universal" (in terms of the objective) implies that his "Truth" will be single and alone. For him there cannot be more than one truth, for there is only one model. He allows us to speak of *my* metaphysics and *your* metaphysics (or should!), each one valid; but not of *my* truth and *your* truth. The important and significant point is that for the actual idealist the position is exactly reversed. He does not allow himself to speak of *my* metaphysics and *your* metaphysics, but he does find it convenient to speak of *my* truth and *your* truth. The metaphysics of the realist is true *for the realist,* but it is not true *for the idealist.* Hence the possibility of more than one truth *for the idealist,* but of only one metaphysics *for him.* In other words, the metaphysics of the actual idealist is determined uniquely by *his truth,* but his truth is determined by nothing. It is an act of thinking. Hence it is not unique. It may seem that for the idealist to speak of *his* truth and *his* error implies the real existence of truth and error for others. But this does not follow, as reference to the earlier argument with regard to the existence of other selves will demonstrate.[24] The truth is true simply because it is my truth and does not transcend me. And by the same token, the truth is true because it is the realist's truth and does not transcend him. But this is not what the realist thinks of when he thinks of "truth"; that is the important point.

[24] See pp. 137–8 of this study.

It is generally supposed that the issue between idealism and realism involves the egocentric predicament. We have tried to show that while this may be the case between realism and most forms of idealism, the issue between realism and actual idealism is a different one. The point may be generalized to include a definition of the issue between actual idealism and all other philosophies that take the study of metaphysics to be meaningful. All other metaphysics contain presuppositional limitations upon the meaning of the "real," and therefore are forced to classify themselves as descriptions only. Since the fundamental issue involves an interpretation of the function of philosophy, the sheer force of numbers in the opposition strongly suggests that Gentile rather than the rest of the company is out of step. But the nature of this fundamental issue makes it impossible to throw the balance in favor of either.

## Chapter Nine

# FORM AND MATTER

The second of the objections to solipsism noted in the general discussion of the problem raised by the *Sistema di logica* came from another group of those who, like the realists, regard solipsism as a false doctrine. They are the critical realists. They come forward to ask Gentile how in the name of common sense he accounts for the apparent independence of the world of nature if the act of thinking is creative of all that is thought of as external to it. Their position is well stated by Mr. Santayana and presents Gentile with serious difficulties: [1]

> Knowledge is knowledge because it has compulsory objects that preëxist.
>
> Matters are ludicrously reversed if it is imagined that a pure spirit contemplating essences could *invent* a body and a world of matter surrounding it; the body exists first, and in reacting on its environment kindles intuitions expressive of its vicissitudes.
>
> What I tuck under my pillow at night I find there in the morning. Economy increases my possessions. People all grow old. Accidents have discoverable causes. There is a possible distinction between wisdom and folly. But how should all this be, and how could experience, or the shocks that punctuate it, teach me anything to the purpose, or lend me any assurance in life not merely a reinforced blindness and madness on my part, unless substances standing and moving in ordered ways surround me, and I was living in the midst of nature?

This experience with independent objects is too common to need further illustration. It is the most difficult of the circumstances which beset actual idealism. The Gentilian doctrine of

[1] *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (Scribner's, New York, 1929), pp. 172, 204, and 236 respectively.

form and matter, which is at the root of his philosophy, is most forcibly brought into doubt. If the *Sistema di logica* gives an answer to the cosmological question here raised it will be found in an examination of that doctrine.

What is the Gentilian doctrine of form and matter? It is that which, according to its interpreter, most clearly distinguishes idealism from all previous philosophy. It had its origin in Kant's theory of knowledge. And it is that, secondarily and more specifically, which differentiates actual idealism from all previous idealisms. Its central rôle in the mind of Gentile cannot be doubted. As for Kant's contribution: [2]

> . . . Before Kant the conception of knowing had always been rigidly materialistic. It reduced all knowing to its matter, of which the form was always a mode, an accident, a particular . . . whereas the Kantian subject is opposed to all objects, natural or otherwise, as the principle productive of all objects of thought.

Kant introduced into philosophy the serious consideration of the subject as a contributor to true knowledge. Previously knowledge had always been tested by its objectivity. Plato insured objectivity by means of the doctrine of reminiscence: Aristotle insured it by reducing the action of the subject to the indiscriminate remirroring of the precognitional material of cognition. According to Gentile, Kant's concept of the subjective element in knowledge makes the true concept of form possible: [3]

> . . . [Form] is form insofar, not as a coefficient or a mechanical completion of matter but rather, as active and productive of experience and as that wherein cognition finds its own material. Matter confronts form, but as the content of experience; it is nothing but the effect of form.

The entertainment of the concept of form as the activity productive of experience may be taken as Gentile's definition of idealism.

[2] *Sistema.* Vol. II, p. 44.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

But to take this step is like leaping onto a stepping stone in the middle of a brook: one must go forward or back. And so with the Kantian position. Kant himself clearly retraced his steps by making the Noumenon the cause behind phenomena. The action productive of experience came ultimately from the Noumenon. Hence a second step is necessary to the idealistic conception of form, that step which leads the philosopher to the other side of the brook: [4]

> . . . If in addition to the material inherent in experience, an antecedent one be admitted, which conditions the activity of the form, then this form, placed thus beside matter in a world in which the activity of the form productive of the effective experience (in which the other matter will be inherent) must intrude and explain itself, could no longer value experience as the transcendental form in its proper value.

In the interest of a presuppositionless metaphysics the Kantian doctrine must be so far surpassed that the Noumenon is removed and all that remains is form, the activity which produces the matter of thinking. This is the idealistic doctrine of form and matter as interpreted by Gentile. "Matter" and "form" so employed convey a different meaning than was given by Aristotle's conception of them. But in an ontology in which the only real is the act of thinking they could have no other significance than that of the differentiation of the act of thinking (*pensiero pensante*) from the material thought (*pensiero pensato*). If one looks at the Gentilian conception of them from the point of view of matter its legitimacy is more readily understood than if one chooses the point of view of form. The Aristotelian concept of matter may be interpreted to include *pensiero pensato* as the "matter" of thinking. From this it is only a step to the position that "form," as opposed to "matter," can only be the act of thinking itself. The caution which must be observed in studying Gentile in this con-

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 45–6.

nection is to remember that when he speaks of form and matter he is thinking of neither in the strictly Aristotelian significance of those words. Hence when he speaks of form producing matter, the statement may not be so extravagant as it would be in the Aristotelian sense. There is a noteworthy parallel here to Gentile's use of the concept of thinking as "creative" of the universe. "Creative" is employed in the only meaning in which it could be employed consistent with the Gentilian metaphysics, as we shall discover.

What answer does the *Sistema di logica* give to the cosmological question? The question regards the apparent independence of the world of nature. The only answer which can be given by actual idealism, and one thoroughly characteristic of it, is that the question is not a philosophic one. According to Gentile the philosopher is concerned exclusively with synthetic judgments *a priori.* Only in such judgments are truth and the real found. Thus the world of nature is not the real world; knowledge about it is synthetic knowledge *a posteriori,* arrived at by that deductive manipulation of empirical data which is usually called induction and which is described in the logic of the abstract. It involves that working about of identities according to the three principles of that logic, which acts as a practical instrument in the solving of practical problems. The world of nature is real only in the concreteness of the totality of the thinkable. As the matter rather than the form of thinking, it must be independent of the act of thinking; if it were not thus independent it would not be the matter of thinking but would be its form. The object of thinking is always thought as an independent object: that is its meaning as object. But it is independent only in this sense, that it is not the act of thinking: it is none the less dependent upon that act in that it must be thought by it. This is a metaphysical dependence again, not a methodological difficulty, and is made necessary by metaphysical and logical demands. The independence

is cosmological and as such does not belong to the realm of a philosophy which is exclusively metaphysical.

There is an interesting parallel here between the doctrine of Gentile and the doctrine of the Plato of the early dialogues, as contrasted with the Plato of the *Timaeus*.[5] Both draw a philosophic circle that leaves out the cosmos. The great difference between the two is that Gentile's doctrine is such that it promises that he will never write his *Parmenides* and eventually his *Timaeus* unless he completely renounces his actual idealism. For it is the essence of actual idealism that it admits of no cosmology, that it admits of no intercourse with the universe around us as such. The universe around Gentile is of interest to him only insofar as it is logically and metaphysically a moment in the dialectic by which the real actualizes itself. The spirit if not the letter of Gentile's idealism demands that the Ego, that first moment of the dialectic *qua* moment, be labelled as an abstract concept. The same considerations dictate this attitude toward cosmology. In itself the cosmos is static, identical with itself epistemologically speaking.

The point which Gentile is trying to make is not that there is no place for cosmology or for natural science. Such a doctrine would be extravagant and foolish. He is trying to say that the place of cosmology and of the natural sciences *is not in the field of philosophy*. He appreciates as much as most men do the contribution of natural science to the solving of many important problems; indeed his writings in the field of education show conclusively that for him the study of the

[5] This parallel between the early Plato and the contemporary Gentile is but partial, of course. The metaphysics of the two are characteristically impractical; depreciatory of the works of empirical investigators. Here the parallel ends. Plato's early philosophy avoids most worldly problems, as Mr. Santayana points out in *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*. In contrast, Gentile in his political writings emphasizes the *actualism* of his idealism. See *Che cosa è fascismo*. More specifically, for another example, see *Proemio*, the initiatory article of the *Giornale critico della filosofia Italiana*, Vol. I, fasc. I, 1920.

natural sciences has its own peculiar value.[6] He is the enemy of science only when it tries to tell the philosopher about the philosophic "real" and "true." In short, Gentile's quarrel is with the scientist turned philosopher, with the scientist who is trying to interpret the totality of the thinkable in the terminology and concepts of natural science. If Gentile appears to be bitter in his indictment of scientists, the fact is explained perhaps by the almost death-grip which positivism under Roberto Ardigò had upon Italian thought before the idealistic movement arose to combat it.

But one cannot in this way dismiss Gentile's dispassionate statement of the non-philosophic character of natural science. In none of Gentile's volumes does he allow himself significant recognition of the findings of modern psychology except to depreciate them. For one specific instance, the development of our knowledge of the subconscious and of complexes is discounted in his educational writings.[7] The teacher, he argues, is concerned with the development of the human spirit, not with the objective bodies or minds of men. This development is in no sense automatic; it depends upon self-awareness in thinking because it is a self-conscious process. It is the conscious exercise of a spiritual freedom. The educational process being so defined, neither the complex nor any other subconscious activity is part of it. Furthermore education is real, for it is concerned directly with the act of thinking. Hence it can be understood only under the aspects of reality. Neither the objective bodies nor the equally objective psycho-physical minds of men are real, but rather arbitrary abstractions. The study of education is, and cannot be other than, the study of philosophy. No study of psychology as it has come to be interpreted by modern psychologists will aid the educator, because it is not concerned with the educative process.

[6] See, for example, *Sommario di pedagogia,* Vol. II, pp. 171 ff., edition of 1925.
[7] *Ibid.,* Vol. I, pp. 37 ff., edition of 1926.

The spirit of our time makes it important to emphasize the reasonableness of this position, fatuous as it may appear at first acquaintance.[8] Gentile does not have the insanity to deny the findings of scientists within their own fields. He does not say that these findings are untrue in the objective sense. He does not expect more than anyone else that the uniformity of nature will be violated, or show a tendency to believe that the laws of physics and chemistry may be disregarded. It is not difficult to point out that he would not live very long if he should act upon such a theory. He takes the position that the findings of science are non-philosophic; his definition of philosophy shows that this must necessarily be so from his point of view. It is his argument, to review it once more, that if philosophy is to find ultimate truths it must be non-presuppositional. And if it is to be non-presuppositional it must not be a study of that which is external to thinking. As we shall show in a moment, there is a real and legitimate question as to the adequacy of such a position; but it may not be argued that it involves either a rejection of the findings of the natural sciences or a violation of them. It is concerned with nothing more nor less than an unusually persistent effort to preserve a valuable interpretation of the function of philosophy. It argues that if the natural sciences combined into a cosmology are accepted as that science which understands all others and is in turn not understood by them, then we are no longer able to find that "real" and that "truth" which are universal and necessary because they presuppose nothing.

Perhaps one further consideration will make the position of actual idealism in this connection clearer. Postulate for the moment that thought *is* determined by something external to it. Postulate that thought is a phenomenon produced by certain activities in a realm objective in relation to it. If this,

[8] For a more detailed account of this interpretation of the natural sciences see the present author's "The Scope of Natural Science," in *The New Humanist,* Vol. VIII, No. 5, Autumn, 1935.

which is in direct contradiction to Gentile's doctrine, is true, what is the consequence? The *Sistema di logica* points out that if this is the case, the word "truth" ceases to have the value Gentile attaches to it. This may not be serious. But Gentile believes that in this same case it also ceases to have the value which we all attach to it. The latter situation is more grave. If our thoughts are integral parts of external events and hence determined by them, then we are no longer free to choose between truth and falsehood. Then our thoughts simply are what they are, the logic of thinking has no power over them (indeed logic is quite useless), and no credit can accrue to us for thinking them.[9] Of course these considerations do not prevent the postulate which we are entertaining from being a truth. Nevertheless, unless this postulate *is thought as true* (which it is, if only momentarily, by its very nature as a postulate) it can have no significance in the present discussion. And if this postulate is thought as true, it can be thought as true only within a metaphysics which is presuppositionless (otherwise it would be an arbitrary guess), which is another way of saying that there is nothing determining the thought by which we arrive at it, and which therefore is a denial of the postulate! This paradox is essential to idealism.

There is a striking similarity between this and the famous saying of Gorgias. If thought is necessarily determined by some entity external to it, we can never know this fact as a truth in the sense in which actual idealism conceives of true judgment. Such an argument appears to be quite unanswerable. It legislates the impossibility of any philosophic judgment in the Gentilian terms to the effect that the cosmos is prior to our thinking about it. It asserts that any judgment to the effect that the cosmos is prior to our thinking about it

[9] The only escape from this conclusion, short of actual idealism, is by way of a rigid dualistic description of reality in which the cosmos and the mind are completely independent of each other. This possibility will be considered briefly at the end of the chapter.

can be known only as an arbitrary description. Gentile's position may be attacked in this connection only along the lines suggested in the following paragraphs. The distinction, examined more fully in the next chapter, between presuppositions and undefined concepts (or assumptions) must be borne in mind. If there were not this distinction one would be forced either to deny the uniqueness of actual idealism or to look upon it as gospel. The former would be doing it an injustice; the latter would constitute an unhappy and altogether untenable position. Every thinker works with undefined concepts; the fact that definition is eventually circular makes this evident. A philosophy must be considered on the basis of its undefined concepts. Gentile assigns certain meanings to "philosophy," "truth," and "reality." If we accept these meanings it appears that the doctrine of the *Sistema di logica,* with proper emendations, follows quite clearly. But that which gives vitality and movement to the study of philosophy is the fact that from philosopher to philosopher undefined concepts are differently interpreted. Because undefined concepts are differently interpreted we are able to criticize the Gentilian metaphysics. To this criticism we shall devote the remainder of this present chapter, for we believe that a serious and unanswerable indictment may be drawn up against Gentile's doctrine as it concerns nature.

To return to the issue upon which this problem rests, may it be said in a final analysis that form alone is creative of matter? Gentile is justified from his position in saying that form (or *pensiero pensante*) is creative of an important aspect of the metaphysical significance of matter (or *pensiero pensato*). But is it wise to interpret form as creative of the *entire* metaphysical significance of matter? Why are we compelled to live in a world in which the uniformity of nature is observed? This seems to be an example of a fact in the material of our thought which might have been otherwise. The uniformity of nature

might have been rigidly observed on week days but modified in some manner on Sundays. For another example, why does the circle demand the second power of its radius and the sphere the third power? Why not the fourth and the fifth powers? There is nothing in the doctrine of Gentile which accounts for what appears to be the obvious fact that the world in which we as natural beings live is as it is. Our systematization of this world may involve a question of choice. A given curve may be described with equal accuracy in polar or in Cartesian coördinates. But the coördinate system once chosen the curve is what it is and can be described only according to a definite equation. And similarly with empirical investigation. The scientist exerts his every effort toward the exclusion of the personal equation. It is his job not to create his material by an act of thinking but to wait and see what the results of his experiments will be. Will gravitational force vary inversely as the square or as the cube of the distance or according to some other power integral or otherwise? No creative act of thinking can tell him that. He is confronted with nature and nature tells him what equations to build. It is all very well for Gentile to object that these are not metaphysical considerations. But there is something of metaphysical importance there. The point is that any metaphysics which pretends to embrace the totality of the thinkable must give an adequate account of the investigations of the natural scientist.

And this is precisely what the Gentilian metaphysics does not do. The Gentilian metaphysics argues that the Not-Ego is essential to the spiritual dialectic, that there must be as one of its moments the determined and not-thinking. But this is a general and not a specific account. The difference between the general and the specific is exactly the difference between the "matter" of Gentile and the ordinary concept of "matter." It is the specificity of the data thought in the investigation of natural objects which is not accounted for in the doctrine of

actual idealism. Gentile argues that by philosophy he is endeavoring to fit the significance of the knowledge gained from the natural sciences into the unity of all particular knowledges. It seems obvious that one of the most significant features of the particular knowledge of the scientist is its *specific* independence from the act of thinking. The act of thinking thinks it *as specific,* but the specific data themselves are quite beyond the power of the act of thinking to create them in their specific character.[10]

The weakness in logic which is responsible for this difficulty has already been noted.[11] Gentile places undue emphasis upon the unity of the concrete synthesis in his dialectic. There is apparently no explanation of the metaphysical evaluation of universals at the expense of particulars. This weakness is most evident in the extreme value given to the unity of knowledge. Gentile is quite within his rights in defining philosophy as the knowledge of all particular knowledges, understanding all others and not being understood by them. But does it follow that the unification of all particular entities in the act of thinking is more real than the particulars which are such necessary constituents of it? The act of thinking is ultimate in the sense that it presupposes nothing, because it includes everything within itself. Nevertheless, if we are to follow Gentile's argument precisely, the act of thinking itself is nothing without the determined particulars thought. By definition only the act of thinking can be called real, but the question we are raising now regards the adequacy of that definition.

We are confronted with the old problem of the duality of body and soul in a new form. Gentile's argument in avoidance of that duality does away, ontologically speaking, with the

[10] This criticism is not the same as that on pp 151–2 of this study. There the problem concerned the necessary character of *any* individual concrete judgment. Here we are concerned with the character of the necessity of the specific material of a given judgment about the cosmos.

[11] See pp. 159–60 of this study.

body. But what is the adequacy of this argument? It gives no account of the independence of the cosmological data from the act of thinking. This is not all. It is an unquestionable part of human experience that the body has an influence upon thinking. It has not needed the researches of abnormal psychology to demonstrate this. We all know the power of a good breakfast or of a good night's sleep or of strenuous exercise over our thinking. And, in the other direction, it is an unquestionable part of human experience that our thinking exerts an influence upon the activity of the body. An examination of the *Sistema di logica* shows that no account is taken there of these two types of experience except to deny them metaphysical significance. Gentile, to be sure, does not deny the objective validity of this reciprocal influence. He could not very well do that any more than he could deny the objective validity of the laws of physics and chemistry. Gentile's metaphysics is not destructive, but it is highly selective. Does this mean that its limitations deny it adequacy?

It is instructive to seek common denominators for the undefined concepts of conflicting philosophies, in order to discover the precise nature of their conflict. There are two sharply divided realms open to the metaphysician. One is the realm internal to thinking; and the other is the realm external to it. The actual idealist applies his primitive concept of the real to the internal; and his opponents, as he has demonstrated, apply their concept of the real to the external. Thus the metaphysics of each is limited in the sense that it is exclusive of the other. But what is the relative importance of these two limitations? The opponent of Gentile, in limiting himself to the external, is denying solipsism. He is evincing his refusal to accept the Gentilian definitions of "truth" and "reality." He is denying the exclusive significance of a region in which metaphysics and logic become one. Gentile, on the other hand, is denying not undefined concepts but a universal human experience which is

somehow given to man in his intercourse with the cosmos. In this comparison it is difficult to believe that the opponents of Gentile are not getting the better of the argument. They find it necessary to admit that they need presuppositions, and they thereby admit as a corollary that their knowledge is not certain knowledge. But Gentile seems to be denying the significance of the undeniably significant. Gentile may have found a presuppositionless and certain knowledge. But of what?

It is Gentile's argument that knowledge gained by observation, consisting of the results of the natural sciences plus our observations of the reciprocal influence of thinking and bodily action, is a systematization of data which are based upon presuppositions. This argument seems to be correct. He rejects these observations as contributing to metaphysics because of his definition of metaphysics as presuppositionless. This, of course, follows. But the point seems to be correctly taken against Gentile that whether or not these data from objective observation require presuppositions for their systematization and use, their specific nature has nothing to do with the presuppositions involved and so far as we can tell is quite independent of the fact that we think them. For example, Galileo's formulation of a physical law to cover the action of falling bodies may depend upon certain metaphysical assumptions. It undoubtedly does. But the specific character of the law which he formulated was such that it was not created by any act of thinking but rather was completely determined by the actual happenings when various objects were dropped from the Leaning Tower of Pisa. This is undeniable. And it also appears undeniable that there is nothing in the metaphysics of Gentile, in his doctrine of form and matter, which would account for this situation.

In the large the question under discussion is whether or not a philosophy which does not include cosmology can be ade-

quate. The final answer depends upon one's conception of the function of philosophy. It is Gentile's claim that the function of philosophy is that of coming into possession of a universal and necessary knowledge through a mediate process of thinking. He further asserts that this knowledge will include an understanding of all particular knowledges without in turn being understood by them. If one may speak for those of Gentile's opponents who regard his position as false, it is their claim that philosophy must be either the rational systematization of immediate intuitions (realists) or a study of the nature of knowledge (critical realists). For each, Gentile and his opponents, the other is beating in the wrong bush.

This is more than an academic question. If we accept Gentile's interpretation of the function of philosophy we are subscribing to a doctrine which sets the whole direction of man's activity toward the dialectic development of the spirit. If we accept the interpretation of his opponents we are subscribing to a doctrine wherein ultimate values are discarded and the whole direction of man's activity is toward living harmoniously with the cosmos. For the former the cosmos is a part of the act of thinking; for the latter the act of thinking is a part of the cosmos. As is always the case, in achieving its particular merit, each must give up some other. The fundamental philosophic merits are mutually exclusive. The opponents of Gentile give up the "real" except as it is an article of faith. They also give up "truth" as that which involves no presuppositions. Gentile gives up that element of significant objectivity in the cosmos which has long been a part of our philosophic thinking. He gives up the objective "true" and the objective "real." The history of philosophy is strong in its support of both Gentile and his opponents. But in one sense, at least, Gentile has the advantage over the cosmologists, for he gives up not the findings of the natural sciences, only their metaphysical significance. They, on the other hand, must give up the quest

for certain knowledge of the real. In persisting in that quest Gentile follows a major tradition of his calling. The search for certain knowledge has long and jealously been guarded by philosophers. In another sense the cosmologists have the advantage, for in giving up the presuppositionless metaphysical truth they legitimately claim to be giving up that which may not be extremely important. It is their claim that the presuppositions of their systems of philosophy are ones to which we are impelled. We must presuppose the uniformity of nature, for example. The significant feature is not in the assumption but in the specific data gathered together into a science on the basis of the presupposition. In short it is the claim of these opponents that the presuppositions are a means to an end and in no significant way determine that end.

The ultimate issue seems here as in the last chapter to be this: What is the function of philosophy? Is it the investigation of the presuppositionless "true" and "real" or is it the investigation of the objective "true" and "real"? Is it the investigation of thinking in and for itself, or is it the investigation of the cosmos in and for itself? This, for metaphysics, is the most fundamental question. To borrow from James, the answer to it gives on the one hand tender-minded philosophies, and on the other tough-minded ones. There is no final or conclusive answer. One cannot attack the question without philosophizing and thereby determining indirectly what one considers the function of philosophy to be. Though this is a point brought out in the *Sistema di logica,* Gentile argues erroneously from it that for this reason the real must be the act of philosophizing. He does not take into account that the first act of philosophizing is carried on by means of thought symbols which rest in undefined concepts. He philosophizes in setting the very definition of philosophy. In Chapter Eight we indicated that the actual idealist seemed to have a certain advantage over the realist because he is not called upon to make any

presuppositions. But it is now evident that this is an answer given from the already-pitched camp of a tender-minded philosophy. And, by the same token, whatever the argument raised to show that the tough-minded philosophers have the advantage will have to be given from their camp.

The cosmological question, as we have called it, introduces the most serious indictment of Gentile's metaphysical doctrine in particular and of his philosophy as a whole that can be drawn. Its destructive force is undeniable, and its power of persuasion is practically universal. But if one chooses to move within Gentile's interpretation of philosophy it is not fatal. There is an obvious kinship between the fundamental issue as we have expressed it and that found in comparing the doctrines of internal and of external relations. In comparing the two Gentile decides in favor of the former on the basis of the fact that it requires no presuppositions. But it is more accurate to say that neither the one doctrine nor the other gives a final answer, either to this or to the problem of form and matter which is allied to it. And there seems to be none in the traditions that have been built around the study of philosophy. The beginnings of Greek philosophy were both metaphysical and cosmological. During the late period of Greek philosophy the point had been reached at which metaphysics was brought seriously into doubt with the rise of various forms of metaphysical scepticism. This scepticism seems to be characteristic of late and sophisticated periods of any philosophic epoch. A new scepticism with regard to metaphysics has grown to full development in the present day. The difference between ancient and modern times, however, is the rise in modern times of a new type of metaphysics based upon the act of thinking, which should not fall so easily when called by its proper name. There is open to the modern philosopher the possibility of a metaphysics in the midst of a scepticism which is unable to destroy it. This recent metaphysics is made possible by a new definition of the function of philosophy, or

rather by a new rendition of the traditional definition of the function of philosophy. To metaphysical values it gives a significant meaning based upon the doctrine of internal relations. And the only answer to it seems to be the assertion of the doctrine of external relations. Yet which of these doctrines gives the more correct interpretation of the function of philosophy is a matter of choice to which an investigation of the traditional usage of undefined concepts gives no definite clue.

One final point. It will occur to the reader to inquire why the choice must be made between an act of thinking which includes the cosmos and a cosmos which includes the act of thinking. Must we choose between the realm external to thinking and the realm internal to it? Can we not set up a dualism in which both demands shall be satisfied? Gentile has a reason for his summary rejection of metaphysical dualism. It can readily be traced back to the statement of the doctrine of internal relations contained in his definition of the real as the totality of the thinkable. But this by no means constitutes a final denial of dualism as a metaphysical doctrine. Indeed the advantage dualism affords in retaining both the freedom of thinking and the objectivity of the cosmos is responsible for its vitality. However, metaphysical dualism is not without major difficulties. It has to be complete; any relation between the two orders of reality may be interpreted as leading inevitably back to monism. The familiar figure of the two clocks shows this clearly. The clock of the mind and the clock of the cosmos seem to be synchronized. But how? If they are run by the same mechanism, like the four clocks of Big Ben, they are parts of the same reality. If someone keeps moving the hands forward or backward, as I do with the clocks in my house, they are parts of the reality enjoyed by him who sets them. If they are perfect timepieces and both of themselves keep accurate time, even then they are bound together by the reality of the time which they both keep. If one insists that the cosmos and acts of thinking be synchronized, and even the parallelist

does this, then one falls with Spinoza back into monism. If they are taken to be completely independent, then, since our knowledge is composed exclusively of acts of thinking and we can have no access to the cosmos, to all intents and purposes one is again in monism. Such an independent cosmos has all of the disadvantages of the Kantian Noumenon.

Metaphysical dualism can be maintained, indeed it is characteristic of the only other type of metaphysics possible in addition to the two we have been comparing. But since it makes the cosmos so thoroughly inaccessible the line of demarcation which it draws may well be considered unfruitful. It will not be a serious departure from our course to outline the complex relation of actual idealism to metaphysical dualism. Though Gentile does not in fact do so, he should concede it a significant and unique place among metaphysical systems. It is unique in that it posits a transcendent reality, which would account for the independence of the world of nature without determining the act of thinking and thus eliminating truth value. But this transcendent cosmos must be presupposed and hence, according to Gentile, unknowable. It could only be intuited. Since it is unknowable it could not be included among those things entertained by a philosophic knowledge. Which is another way of saying that dualism must be included among the descriptions given us by traditional metaphysics. For Gentile, then, metaphysical dualism could be asserted as true (because within it judgments are free and hence have value) only to be denied as non-philosophic (because the cosmological part of it cannot be known with certain knowledge): epistemological dualism is a significant and important doctrine, but metaphysical dualism contains the seeds of its own destruction. With this digression, by no means a complete statement of Gentile's case against dualism but merely an indication of the direction his argument takes, we may close the discussion of Gentile's relation to traditional metaphysics.

## Chapter Ten

# THE GENTILIAN METAPHYSICS AND THE MEANINGFUL

The final objection to Gentile's metaphysics, and one quite different from those so far considered, comes from the neo-positivists and their philosophic kin. It takes the direction of questioning the meaningfulness of all metaphysics and hence is only incidentally an attack upon Gentile. Outstanding among those who find no place for metaphysics in philosophy are Messrs. Carnap, Schlick and Wittgenstein. They represent a contemporary movement of unquestionable prominence and importance. The arguments by which they arrive at their scepticism toward metaphysics must be examined with great care in any attempt to define the status of actual idealism. The significance of these neo-positivists should not be underestimated, for they are endeavoring to redirect the energies of philosophers away from metaphysical problems. If successful, one cannot doubt that they will change the entire meaning of philosophic study. Certainly it is their aim to do so. In this sense their criticism of Gentile's doctrine is, of all those we shall consider here, the most profound.

Basic to their point of view is a definition of knowledge. In the light of recent developments in factual and formal sciences they assert that empirical propositions though synthetic are *a posteriori,* and that logical and mathematical propositions though *a priori* are analytic. They maintain as a fundamental thesis that there are no synthetic propositions *a*

*priori*.[1] Hence, for example, Messrs. Carnap and Wittgenstein: [2]

Every proposition in knowledge must establish itself as meaningful by logical analysis. Thereby it will be found either that it deals with a tautology or a contradiction, or that the proposition is a meaningful declaration neither tautological nor contradictory. In the first case the proposition belongs to the sphere of logic inclusive of mathematics. In the second case it is an empirical proposition: it is referable to the Given and there may be taken basically as true or false.

In order to discover whether or not the picture is true or false we must compare it with reality.
It cannot be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false.
There is no picture which is *a priori* true.

The contexts from which these quotations are taken recommend the conclusions that the division of judgments into empirical and logical is exhaustive, that there is no other type of knowledge and that therefore metaphysics (which falls within neither of the two types mentioned) is not a legitimate part of knowledge. It is significant to note that actual idealism, which is most interested in questioning this denial of metaphysics, moves a considerable distance with neo-positivism in this speculation. It is precisely the argument of that part of the *Sistema di logica* on the logic of the abstract that neither factual nor analytic knowledge can be metaphysical. The former presupposes entities external to thought, which are to be known as real: the latter presupposes a code and a principle of analysis. The former lacks certainty because hypothetical: the latter though certain is tautological. Actual idealism and

[1] The writer wishes to acknowledge here his indebtedness to an excellent summary of the neo-positivist position by Messrs. Blumberg and Feigl in "Logical Positivism," *Journal of Philosophy*, May 12, 1931. The article is recommended to those who wish to study this doctrine.

[2] Carnap, *Die alte und die neue Logik Erkenntnis*, 1er Band 1930–31, p. 25. Wittgenstein, *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus* (Harcourt, Brace; New York, 1922). 2.223–5. Quoted in the text in this order.

neo-positivism move together in their criticism of the traditional metaphysics. At the question of the legitimacy of the synthetic judgment *a priori,* however, they part company. Idealism has been that philosophy which has harbored the synthetic judgment *a priori;* and though Kant was the destroyer of the metaphysics of his day, actual idealism has employed his synthetic judgment *a priori* as the basis of a new metaphysics. Indeed the actual idealist must agree that if he is unable to establish a metaphysics upon such judgments he must renounce claim to metaphysics. Hence the first problem for consideration in this chapter: Can there be such a knowledge?

The major judgment of the logic of the concrete is that the real is the act of thinking. This is admittedly an *a priori* judgment. No amount of experience in itself could give it. But is it clear that it is not an analytic judgment? Neo-positivism and actual idealism are agreed that metaphysical propositions, whether meaningful or not, are not *a posteriori.* The important question is whether they are analytic or synthetic judgments. The analytic judgment is characterized as being part of a deductive system which contains undefined terms plus axioms or postulates. A code for plane geometry is the most familiar example of such a system. The Gentilian logic of the concrete is similar in that it contains certain undefined terms, elements given a common significance by common usage. Indeed it would be impossible to use words at all without employing some undefined elements. But it has been found in Chapter Seven of this study that the logic of the concrete contains no presuppositions. The Gentilian concept of the real determines that it shall be the act of thinking; indeed if there were not this determination there could be (within actual idealism) more than one legitimate metaphysics. But the important and crucial point is that this determination is a free determination, to employ a paradox. It is not given by any code and is not

based upon any presuppositions. If it were, Gentile would have to agree that there could be no foundational metaphysics. There is nothing in the "real" as such which legislates the judgment that it is the act of thinking, as there is that in the nature of a triangle which legislates the judgment that the sum of its interior angles equals two right angles. The "real" is conceived as the totality of the thinkable. It is the contention of the logic of the concrete that our very act of thinking about the "real" leads us to the judgment that it is the act. But the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is arrived at by the aid of definitions and axioms. This is the character of the analytic procedure, and differentiates it from that synthetic procedure in the logic of the concrete which provides its own norm. According to Gentile it is the synthetic judgment *a priori* that makes philosophy possible as a science. In basing his metaphysical doctrine upon the act of thinking, which is *norma sui*, Gentile has succeeded in producing a knowledge which is at once non-empirical and non-analytic.

There is no point more crucial than this in the entire doctrine of actual idealism. And it is a point which Gentile does not make clear. If the initial interpretation of the function of philosophy is considered to be a laying down of presuppositions, then no philosophy is presuppositionless.[8] But it is possible to make a significant distinction between the initial interpretation of the function of philosophy and the laying down of presuppositions. Gentile does not seem to appreciate the importance of this distinction, but it is essential if his meta-

[8] In this case Gentile's position merges with that of traditional metaphysics and we are in possession of a number of metaphysical doctrines verifiable analytically and empirically in the sense in which both the Newtonian and the Einsteinian physics, for example, are verifiable analytically and empirically. But this is neither a final nor a discriminating verification According to this point of view the issue between metaphysics and neo-positivism regards the broad meaningfulness of ultimately non-verifiable (and hence merely descriptive) judgments. This issue is raised on pp. 209–10 of this study in connection with the Gentilian metaphysical judgments, but is applicable in the form given to traditional metaphysics *vs.* neo-positivism.

physics is to be distinguished from any traditional metaphysics and, indeed, if it is to be free from self-contradiction. There is no philosophy which, by the very act of naming itself as a science, does not appeal to undefined concepts; this we have already seen. But by an application of the Theory of Types, this appeal may be interpreted as functioning on a different level than that of the traditional invocation of philosophic presuppositions, once the function of philosophy has been interpreted. In the historical chapters of the *Sistema di logica* the significant point brought out is that previous metaphysicians have depended upon entities previous to the act of thinking and known through it. But Gentile does not exhibit this dependence, and it is in this sense that he terms his doctrine presuppositionless. Gentile's metaphysical thinking depends upon no *Logos* external to itself for its verity; hence it cannot be analytically arrived at because it does not rely specifically upon the principles necessary to govern analysis. Analysis requires previous principles according to which to proceed: in the Gentilian metaphysics there are none, for thinking is *norma sui*. The three principles of the logic of the abstract, necessary to any analysis, are logically and ontologically the consequence of the synthetic act of thinking. If Gentile's metaphysical judgments were analytic they would violate with palpable clearness his interpretation of the function of philosophy. But he does not depend upon analytic principles in the development of his metaphysics. The dependence is in the other direction. Hence his metaphysical judgments are synthetic. Since it is admitted by the neo-positivist that they are *a priori*, it may be concluded that they are both synthetic and *a priori* and that the synthetic judgment *a priori* is possible.

This point has been given emphasis because it is vital to Gentile's doctrine. The question as to whether or not the synthetic judgment *a priori* is possible appears to be answerable only affirmatively or negatively, and these answers appear

to be contradictory. But inquiry shows that the neo-positivist's position is quite as justifiable as that of Gentile, in spite of the conclusion reached in the paragraph above. When we consider the problem on the initial level at which the function of philosophy is decided upon, all of the philosophic doctrines about reality and truth follow because of the fact that "philosophy" and "reality" and "truth" are interrelated concepts, though the interrelation is one due to habit of language and not to logic. Hence on the initial level there is a sense in which Gentile's synthetic judgment *a priori* is "analytic," if we are willing to consider "analytic" applicable to studies of language usage. If it were synthetic on this level (or even logically analytic) there could be but one interpretation of the function of philosophy. The assertion of so basic a dogmatism is made inexcusable by the various meanings which the function of philosophy is in fact given. Though Gentile himself does not seem to realize it, his description of metaphysical judgments as synthetic *a priori* may refer only to judgments upon that level achieved after the function of philosophy has received definite interpretation. The whole question depends upon the level at which "analytic" is taken and the meaning given it. The neo-positivist's doctrine is thus, as a criticism, more a different interpretation of knowledge than a destruction of actual idealism. And the same relation holds in the other direction.

This illustrates clearly the difference of approach to philosophy found in comparing neo-positivism and actual idealism. It should be borne in mind that the present discussion is not an attempt to show fatal weaknesses in the former which the latter has uncovered. The point of this discussion is that neo-positivism from its point of view offers definite objections to metaphysics. They have been given so much attention that it is desirable to indicate the manner in which actual idealism meets them. We shall conclude our defense of synthetic judgments *a priori* with a final argument in favor of Gentile's posi-

tion. If the metaphysical judgments of actual idealism were logically analytic it would be possible to show that an analysis of "totality of the thinkable" and "act of thinking" would bring them together in an identity-relation. But it is rather the nature of the act of thinking *in itself as act* and not its nature as defined that is responsible for the keynote of the Gentilian metaphysics. Furthermore, to widen the argument, we have already shown that some philosophers (e.g. Plato and Aristotle) have started with the same assumptions on the first level as to the function of philosophy and the definition of the real (i.e. as transcending the act of thinking) and arrived at entirely different metaphysical systems solely by virtue of their choice on the second level of different presuppositions as to the nature of the *Logos*. These presuppositions are not given by an analysis of the initial assumptions, for such differences in results are not found in an analytic system. They are synthetic judgments. In Chapter Eight we learned that while the metaphysical judgments of traditional philosophy have been arbitrary descriptions those of Gentile are universal and necessary. The highly important question which remains is as to whether or not Gentile in preserving the universal and necessary value of his metaphysical judgments has been able to retain at the same time their meaningfulness. As we shall see, our investigation of this question will involve the meaningfulness of any metaphysical judgment.

Even if synthetic judgments *a priori* are possible, Gentile is still faced by the charge that the metaphysics built upon them is meaningless. Let us consider it more specifically: [4]

Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their sense-

[4] Wittgenstein, *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4 003. Schlick, *Erleben, Erkennen, Metaphysik Kant-Studien*. Band XXXI, Heft 2/3, 1926, pp. 156–8. Quoted in the text in this order.

lessness. Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language. . . .

And so it is not to be wondered at that the deepest problems are really *no* problems.

. . . The metaphysician will not know things, he will *experience* them. . . . All of our knowledge of Being is principally acquired through the methods of the particular sciences; every other "ontology" is idle babbling. No matter how many words the philosopher seeks for experience, he can hit upon only formal attributes of them. The content always escapes him. . . . Metaphysics is impossible because contradictory. If the metaphysician seeks only experience, his demands may be fulfilled, through poetry and art and life itself. . . . But if he wishes thoroughly to experience the *transcendent* he mistakes experience for knowledge and, befogged by double contradiction, seeks empty shadows. . . . Metaphysical systems contain much science, and much poetry, but they never contain metaphysics.

This issue is more clearly one of interpretation than was the former. The neo-positivists have defined their position so accurately that their doctrine is unanswerable. Even Gentile should agree that according to their definition of the "meaningful" metaphysics must certainly be defined as meaningless, for the meaningful to them is the demonstrable and Gentile asserts that his metaphysical doctrine is non-demonstrable. He thereby admits it to membership in the class of judgments meaningless to the neo-positivist.[5] If it were demonstrable it would depend upon a transcendent *Logos*.

This agreement clarifies the issue. As it concerns the actual idealist and the neo-positivist the problem has passed into a sphere in which the neo-positivistic "meaning" is no longer applicable. To appeal to it is to beg the question. The neo-positivist must fall back on the judgment, which he shares with the pragmatist, that the logic of the concrete is without meaning in the sense that the answers to the metaphysical

[5] *Sistema*. Vol. II, p. 222.

problems which it sets make no significant difference in ordering one's life. Gentile very evidently believes that certain nondemonstrable propositions are meaningful in the sense that the assertion of them is important to living itself. This is the rock bottom of the difference between the two doctrines.

Is a synthetic knowledge *a priori* significant in a broad sense? We ask many questions of a metaphysical nature, but in answering them do we not rationalize according to a preconceived value, as Mr. Dewey describes us doing in his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*? What difference does it make to our lives whether we are monists or pluralists? Are not metaphysical questions, like problems in chess, playthings of the intellect? Gentile would agree with Mr. Dewey that the metaphysics of the past has been a rationalization of presuppositions. But it follows from this neither that metaphysics must be of such a character nor that for this reason the solving of metaphysical questions necessarily makes no difference to living. Metaphysics has given value to various undertakings and thereby lent a direction to human striving, whether justifiably or not. Neo-positivism has gone the way of demonstrating that the metaphysics of the past has been descriptive, arbitrary, and based upon presuppositions whose plausibility was a matter of immediate intuition. Actual idealism has gone this distance and, parting company with neo-positivism, proceeded further along a path which leads to a denial that metaphysics is meaningless in a broad sense. Neo-positivism would have to show that metaphysics is necessarily a matter of immediate intuition in order to prevent actual idealism from so proceeding. According to its own standards it has done so. The great point of difference is that neo-positivism has taken the position that all metaphysics is a matter of presuppositions, while actual idealism has invoked the Theory of Types (implicitly only, of course) to differentiate between presuppositions and assumptions. Gentile has been persistent and, we believe, suc-

cessful in his attempt to show that there can be a necessary and universal knowledge of the real which is presuppositionless. But in what sense is it meaningful?

One of the definitions of philosophy in the *Sistema di logica* illustrates the broad meaningfulness intended in that work: [6]

> . . . By philosophy is always understood . . . the most universal form of the spirit, which understands all other forms without being understood by them in return.

Philosophy performs the unique function of gathering together all of the particular knowledges into a unified system. Is this a significant function, or could we do without it? In other words, is the "real" in the sense in which Gentile uses it a meaningful concept? Must the particular knowledges of the various empirical sciences be interpreted as pertaining to the whole of human knowledge if they are to be guides for action? For example, the fund of knowledge recently produced by the field of psychology is a partial knowledge in the sense that all empirical knowledge is partial. It limits its field of study very strictly; and gives many hypotheses without ever giving certain knowledge. It represents a skillful and ingenious tabulation of data procured in a field limited by the investigation and under conditions as nearly as possible objective. These data may be expressed according to a formula. A formula is a shorthand record of past events, with a hypothetical reference to the future which is often of a high degree of probability. It may tell us that specific stimuli have been known to be followed by fixed responses in what we are accustomed to call "emotion." It may tell us the frequency of types of color-blindness. It may tell us the average reaction time of the individual driving a car. It may tell us of the building up of activity patterns which it calls conditioned responses. Psychology records events, establishes relationships or functions be-

[6] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 129. See also p. 122 of this study.

tween events which have already occurred, and tells us with a high degree of accuracy what we should do if we wish certain future events to occur. But psychology thinks in terms of the empirical presuppositions of natural science. What happens when a thinker in another field denies the universal validity of these presuppositions? Instances of this situation are legion. The religious teacher finds the concept of the human soul more significant than any psycho-physiological description. Within natural science itself there are differences in the interpretation of the same phenomena, different significances seen; as, for example, the difference between the interpretations of life given by chemistry and zoölogy. Wider perspectives are necessary.

The crucial point is that while we may widen our perspective to include all empirical investigations, and hence coördinate the particular sciences without the help of metaphysics, we must go still further. Empirical science can tell us all we are able to know *if* we wish certain events to occur in the future. Psychology tells us, for example, what to do with the highest probability of success if we wish to rear a child so that he will be conditioned in one way or another. But there is nothing in its entire wealth of research and experiment to tell us either how the child should be conditioned or whether there is a more desirable way of rearing children than deliberately setting about to condition their responses. These two questions are entirely outside of its sphere. They are not empirical questions, yet ones which parents and teachers must meet every day. A few years ago when plans were being drawn for the building of Radio City a careful empirical investigation was made of the plan upon which stores at the outer edges should be built in order to bring the greatest number of pedestrians to the inner parts of the building. Here is a clear example of a factual study. Granted that you want to bring the greatest number of pedestrians into Radio City what ground plan should be employed? *But do we want to bring*

*them into Radio City? Should we build a Radio City?* These are questions of value, and no empirical science has ever settled a question of value. Yet we act upon values every day. To return to our former example, what should the aim of education be? No science of education has ever been able to tell us that. Granted that certain results are desirable, it tells us how most practically to go about achieving them. But what results do we want to achieve? Every inquiry into cause and effect, into usefulness, is important; but there must be an end-in-itself for our action. Utility is only useful to some end. The ends according to which human beings act are greater than life or death or pleasure or pain. Anyone who tries to tell us how children should be educated, or how a government should be run, or how a family budget should be made out, is dealing with values and hence is a philosopher and a metaphysician. Indeed with every action man is a metaphysician whether he will or no; he is acting to bring nearer something which is desirable. We all act upon universal and necessary judgments not contributed by empirical knowledge, because it deals with the hypothetical and factual; and not given by abstract logic, because this logic deals in tautologies. To sum up, no final reliance can be placed upon hypothetical knowledge because we must have a non-hypothetical standard according to which we may judge the merits of our hypotheses. It is true that we may go so far as to deal with many values as hypothetical, and proceed to test their usefulness; but that test can be only in terms of a value which is not hypothetical. Shall we test Christianity to see how well it works? But what do you mean by "how well"? Ultimate value, hence metaphysics, is inescapable.

The neo-positivist embraces an interpretation of philosophy thoroughly different from this. The case is probably not so overwhelmingly against him as the preceding arguments might suggest. There is something to be said on his side, and this we

must find. His defense seems to lie in his theory of knowledge, which comes directly from his characterization of the philosopher's job. When for example, Mr. Wittgenstein says: [7]

> The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.
>
> The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

he certainly limits the philosopher to the rôle of commentator and implies that knowledge can come only from those who deal empirically with the facts. This is brought out even more clearly in an excellent summary statement by Messrs. Blumberg and Feigl: [8]

> As against the coherence theory of truth it is held that the single atomic proposition is true or false. It is true when the fact which it asserts is the case, false when it is not the case. The truth or falsity of propositions is ascertained by comparing them with reality.
>
> Thus through an analysis of knowledge and symbolism we are led to a theory of meaning in terms of facts and propositions.

The implication here is that reality is factual; the factual functions as the *Logos*. It is interesting to note that we are faced with the same presupposition which, in Chapter Eight, we found the realist employing.

Both realism and positivism built their doctrines upon that which is external to thinking. It has been seen that this presupposition can be based upon nothing but immediate intuition, and hence for Gentile does not qualify as knowledge. For the realist, who affirms this presupposition with "certainty," it is truly a faith; the faith of modern scientific doctrine. But for one like the neo-positivist, who takes care to employ only

[7] *Op. cit*, 4.112 and 6 53.
[8] "Logical Positivism" (*Journal of Philosophy*, May 21, 1931), p. 288.

hypothetical judgments, a tentative reliance upon immediate intuition in relation to the factual is not so damaging. It is his way of solving that problem of describing nature to which no philosophy has found a conclusive answer. By substituting "factual" for "reality" he thereby shoulders a lighter burden. How does he compare propositions with the factual? Always by experimentation, the testing of hypotheses. He thus forces "knowledge" to play the rôle he has assigned to it. We cannot have knowledge until we have tested our hypotheses. In other words, knowledge is only knowledge when it has been put into practice. When we face situation *A* we are equipped with an hypothesis as to how to solve the problem involved. We try the hypothesis in the situation. If its prediction and the factual event are alike the hypothesis becomes knowledge. We then face situation *B,* later than *A* but as similar to it as one may wish. In this second phase the knowledge again becomes an hypothesis, because we do not know without making a metaphysical assumption that the behavior of the factual has not changed. In other words, and for the neo-positivist, the gaining of knowledge is its own destruction. We possess only hypotheses, and we are allowed them only because of an obviously safe initial hypothesis regarding the uniformity of nature.

But further considerations are necessary in formulating a theory of knowledge. We cannot always test our hypotheses by means of experimentation, for there are certain propositions to which this method is not appropriate. Take the proposition, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This is surely not a meaningless proposition; it is expressed in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. His aim goes no farther than the proposition itself; his aim is that loving of one's fellow man which expresses the reality of brotherhood. Since this proposition contains its value within itself, there could be no gain in experimenting with it in the factual realm except in terms of a value even more profound, which of course would raise the whole ques-

tion again. The neo-positivist will legitimately criticize this case as one wherein the direction of conduct is determined by a presupposed value rather than one arrived at by the testing of hypotheses in experience. Gentile would agree with the substance of this criticism, but would nevertheless assert the real existence of a non-presupposed value prior to experience. Gentile claims to have found a philosophic value, *norma sui,* arrived at through a mediate process giving a universal and necessary truth. If the logic of the concrete is without error in its execution there is a knowledge which is not determined in its truth or falsity by experimentation, and which is at the same time significant to the ordering of human living. But according to the interpretation of the neo-positivist and in the terms in which he describes the epistemological process, even this is hypothetical.

This situation in the realm of value typifies the entire difference between the two doctrines. It involves the meaning of "I think. . . ." To the neo-positivist this gives a hypothetical character to all assertions: to the actual idealist it gives a necessary and universal value to them. For the actual idealist, man always acts upon a universal and necessary knowledge: if it did not for him have these characteristics he would act upon whatever knowledge did. Man may act hesitatingly, but even his hesitation is an element in a universal and necessary knowledge. And philosophy is the science that provides us with this knowledge. For the neo-positivist, man always acts upon tentative hypotheses, for to him the judgments upon which the possibility of a universal and necessary knowledge are based are "meaningless." Man may act with assurance, but his knowledge is always partial and provisional. And philosophy is the study that tells us the nature of this knowledge. It is true, continues the neo-positivist, that in our approach to nature we must hypothesize its uniformity in order to build any other hypotheses. And it is true that in our action

we must assume certain basic values, such as utility and happiness, in order to direct our activities. But this latter assumption is so thoroughly endorsed by common sense that the fact that it is presuppositional makes no difference to its acceptance.

What, then, of the meaningfulness of the actual idealist's metaphysics? The neo-positivist characterizes it as "meaningless" because for him it represents a series of hypothetical judgments verified in practice if at all. It is the labelling of such judgments as "universal" and "necessary" that calls forth his criticism. The actual idealist asserts that reality is of such and such a character. The neo-positivist asserts that we should make tentative plans for action in our world and test them as we go along. Such problems as the former finds significant to the ordering of life, the latter must also find significant. This is not the true point of the disagreement. If it were the neo-positivist could easily be driven from combat. They disagree in their attitude toward such problems. The former asserts answers to these problems which he calls "metaphysical": the latter finds the problems unanswerable except by practice. *But* the neo-positivist must accept as part of his initial equipment a few basic commonsense judgments of value (e.g. happiness, physical comfort), judgments accepted generally by mankind as representing the goals toward which it is striving. Without these there could be no experimentation and no testing. Facts in themselves are nothing: their interpretation demands value judgments and the most elementary logic will show that the basic value judgments may not be hypothetical. This brings the argument for a third time to the same fundamental level, that at which we arrived in discussing realism and critical realism. For the neo-positivist the function of philosophy is the clarification of speculations based upon the propositions and experiments of natural science, employing a directional undercurrent of generally accepted (because com-

mon-sense) ideals. The general acceptance of these ideals places them, for him, beyond question and therefore with no need of metaphysical sanction. The idealist in his interpretation of the function of philosophy questions even these ideals, perhaps in part because they are so generally accepted, and therefore needs metaphysics as much as earlier philosophers have needed it. Behind these interpretations of the function of philosophy no philosopher, or anyone else, can go. Are the ideals toward which man should strive those generally recognized, or are they those known only to a few wise and sensitive individuals? We shall never know.

Since this discussion has led into the field of value, a word about the Gentilian ethics is relevant. It is clear that his ethics is dependent upon his metaphysics. The good for Gentile is the development of the human spirit according to the dialectic of the logic of the concrete. This doctrine is brought out clearly in the *Sommario di pedagogia come scienza filosofica*. It appears at first to depend upon an assumption that the development of the human spirit is good in itself. But more accurately the ontological significance of the dialectic is what makes this development good in itself. In other words, it is not dependent upon a separate assumption in the field of ethics. The value of the development of the human spirit is ultimately a metaphysical value, for man insofar as he is real is active and developing thought. Ethical value, that is, ultimately resides in the act of thinking. This act is a free act and since it is free it obeys not a transcendent standard or ideal, but the law of its being which is its own. Our good consists in the dialectic development of our thinking. We cannot escape this dialectic, but we can either neglect or nourish it. It should be our highest aim to do the latter, to improve our understanding and hence our action as much as possible. We cannot in advance know either the direction or the limits of our striving. But we can sustain our striving and value the

progress for which it is responsible. This is the meaning of the inclusion of ethics in metaphysics in Gentile's doctrine.

Before closing this chapter there is one final point which ought to be considered. It is suggested by the quotation from Messrs. Blumberg and Feigl in which they reject a coherence theory of truth. Such a theory belongs to those metaphysics which recognize themselves as descriptive. A study of deductive systems shows that there are a number equally descriptive of given facts. They contain different undefined elements, employ different assumptions, and exhibit different structures. Yet they are all coherent. The only possible criteria of choice among them are adequacy and convenience. This situation is exactly that in which traditional metaphysical systems find themselves; each depends upon the primitive entities to which reality is ascribed and each is built on its own assumptions. Coherence is demanded of the Gentilian doctrine, as it would be demanded of any doctrine; but Gentile does not offer his as true by virtue of its coherence, no matter how much his definition of the real may suggest this.[9] The traditional metaphysics is perfectly coherent if it admits that knowledge for it is based upon immediate intuition. The non-metaphysics of the neo-positivist is equally coherent if it admits that it possesses hypotheses only. The truth for Gentile is given value by the free act of thinking. It is immanent, whereas any truth based on coherence would be transcendent. A truth of the latter type would be based on the logic of the abstract, and would require certain presuppositions with regard to the *Logos* (the three principles) in order to achieve value. The former is *norma sui:* therein is its value. The reality of the act of thinking presupposes nothing; hence it must receive its truth value from itself. This is both the uniqueness of Gentile's position, which differentiates him from all other metaphysi-

[9] That Gentile does not himself always realize this is illustrated by his misuse of "truth." See pp. 129–30 of this study.

cians; and the strength of his solipsism, which separates him from the neo-positivists. Whatever recommendation can be given actual idealism will find its major force in this uniqueness and this strength.

# PART FOUR

# CONCLUSION

## Chapter Eleven

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF GENTILE

The most significant features of actual idealism are its attempt to establish a new doctrine of metaphysics and the reasons which it gives for doing so. Its most interesting feature is that it reopens the defense of solipsism against arguments which, beginning with the *Theaetetus,* have been almost universally accepted. Considering the *Sistema di logica* in and for itself, we found certain major errors in execution. Two of these have to do with Gentile's use of words: when rectified the alterations ought not to affect the thought which these words are intended to express:

(1) There are two meanings given to the word, "truth"; one involving a freedom from self-contradiction, and the other concerned with the relation of one man's thinking to that of another. The former is a necessary but not sufficient element in the latter. My opponent's doctrine will always be free from self-contradiction to him, but to me it is error not necessarily because it (taken objectively) is self-contradictory to me, but perhaps because it does not take into account certain features of experience which are integral to my doctrine.

(2) There is a conflict between "thought" and "thinkable." We find Gentile saying that some men's thoughts are not thinkable. There is a meaning hidden in such a statement, we have seen, but it is obviously difficult to find.

Further errors of this type, resulting from the use of the same word in the logic of the abstract and in the logic of the concrete, have been noted and footnoted. But an understand-

ing of the major ones is essential to clarity in reading the *Sistema di logica.*

Five other errors, however, are more serious in that they affect Gentile's thought development. In the first place, there are the metaphysical considerations in the logic of the abstract. Inasmuch as Gentile himself demonstrates that this logic is not self-contained, that it depends for its value upon the logic of the concrete, he should not allow himself to draw metaphysical conclusions from any of the three fundamental principles of thinking considered as object. Not only does the argument from the *Principle of Excluded Middle* seem out of place, but its invalidity undermines all of the metaphysics built thereupon in the logic of the abstract. Strictly speaking, the logic of the abstract concerns itself in no way with the nature of the Gentilian real. Gentile has fallen into the trap opened by the methodological difficulty inherent in any expression of the nature of reality. It would be a distinct improvement of the *Sistema di logica* if this argument were removed and the entire burden of the metaphysical doctrine allowed to rest, as it should, upon the original requirements set for "truth" and "reality," which may be satisfied only by the concrete act of thinking, *pensiero pensante.*

In the second place, there occurs throughout the logics both of the abstract and of the concrete the seemingly central concept of the Ego. We have tried to show that such a concept involves fatal weaknesses. In employing it Gentile is enslaving himself to the idealistic tradition which he is so anxious to reform. When the full expression of reality comes to be the "act of thinking," the Ego must necessarily fall with the Noumenon and the Absolute into disuse. The *Sistema di logica* possesses all of the ingredients necessary to this final step in the idealist's progress, but it appears that the metaphysical vagueness of "Ego" is not noted by Gentile. The fault is undoubtedly explained by the nature of *pensiero pensante,* for

it seems to connote a self-conscious thinking personality. But such a connotation would involve a presupposition, and it is precisely such presuppositions that *pensiero pensante* is brought forward to overcome. No thinker breaks completely from his past; his thinking develops out of his heritage. The "Ego" is Gentile's Darwin's Point.

The third error occurs in establishing the *norma sui* character of *pensiero pensante*. With regard to this task Gentile's doctrine appears to rest insecurely upon the argument that the dialectic in the logic of the concrete is necessary to it. This is a necessity established *sui generis* in the act of thinking and gives a metaphysical foundation to Gentile's logic. But it is difficult to find a connection between it and the necessity of any *particular* act of thinking. Gentile has established the necessity of the dialectic in general, but not that of the individual act of thinking.[1] We fail to find the relation between the two, as Gentile describes it, established by him. It has been necessary on our part to introduce new, and more definite, arguments.

In the fourth place, Gentile makes no explicit recognition of the different levels of postulation, assumptions and presuppositions, which are necessary to his doctrine if it is to stand. The distinction is so obviously essential both to his argument that actual idealism is presuppositionless and to the assertion of the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori,* and hence to the entire metaphysical doctrine, that his disregard of it makes his position untenable. Gentile may have considered this an obvious point, but it becomes apparent only after a mental struggle in which he gives little aid.

Lastly, there is nowhere in the *Sistema di logica* a justification of the ontological valuation of the unity of the act of thinking at the expense of its multiplicity. This is the most serious of all of the errors in Gentile's statement. *Pensiero*

[1] This refers only to the criticism on pp. 151–2 of this study, and should not be confused with the material in Chapter Nine. See also footnote 10 on p. 195 of this study.

*pensante* is synthetic. As synthetic, it is a synthesis of parts. It is true, according to Gentile's interpretation, that the parts lack ontological significance without reference to the synthesis. But it seems also to be true, and this Gentile does not admit, that the synthesis may lack ontological significance without reference to the parts. We have tried to show that this error seems to be overcome by the force of Gentile's initial concept of the nature of "reality." But this correction the reader of the *Sistema di logica* must make for himself. As it stands Gentile's doctrine is inconclusive in this respect.

Of these five errors, the first three are errors of commission. With regard to the first, the *Sistema di logica* is saved only by virtue of the fact that the erroneous argument is not the only one by which the metaphysical doctrine is established. The second consists in the employment of a concept that contradicts its context, but for which a better substitute is suggested by that context. In the third, Gentile fails in his claim to have established the *norma sui* character of thinking. However it probably can, within the Gentilian system, be established. All three call for emendation of the book.

The last two errors are errors of omission. In both cases we seem able out of the material offered to add the arguments which are lacking. But Gentile should not have omitted them. We may conclude that while actual idealism is a defensible doctrine, by virtue of the emendations and additions indicated, the *Sistema di logica* is an imperfect statement of it chiefly on these five counts.

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Previous to the *Sistema di logica* there were but two doctrines with regard to the *Logos:* that it transcends the act of thinking, and that it does not exist. The possibility of its being found within the act of thinking was excluded by

time-honored arguments. The former is the doctrine of traditional metaphysics; the latter is the doctrine of scepticism. Ever since philosophy was old enough to achieve scepticism these two doctrines have opposed each other, the one claiming to know the real with certain knowledge, the other declaring such a knowledge of the real to be impossible. The burden of proof has, by the nature of the case, been upon those who affirmed the former doctrine. The vitality of the issue between the two has proved at least one thing, and that is that the traditional metaphysician did *not* know the truth with certain knowledge. It seems, too, to have shown that the sceptic could not prove the impossibility of such a knowledge. The sceptics could show only that from their point of view the quest for certainty in metaphysics has been unsuccessful. The importance of the *Sistema di logica* is its suggestion of an adequate defense of a third doctrine, one which claims to know the real with certain knowledge but differing from former claims in relying upon a *Logos* immanent in the act of thinking. It avoids the fallacious argument according to the egocentric predicament, which has been the defeat of previous doctrines of a similar nature, and finds a meaning for non-verifiable judgments. This third doctrine is, in many respects, midway between the other two. Actual idealism agrees with traditional metaphysics that the *Logos* is necessary to philosophic truth: it agrees with the sceptic that this *Logos* may not transcend the act of thinking without renouncing its value-giving power. It both agrees and disagrees with the two. Ultimately there is no choice among the three. The advocacy of any one is dependent upon one's interpretation of the function of philosophy and, since that interpretation initiates every inquiry, it cannot be argued.

Granted the legitimacy of the development of actual idealism, is it valuable and important as a concept of the function of philosophy? Is Gentile's contribution in avoiding the pit-

falls both of traditional metaphysics and of scepticism a significant one? Granted that he has worked out a metaphysical doctrine which is more than an arbitrary description, what has he as a result? Is actual idealism strong and vital or is it so emasculated by the rigidity of its initial assumptions as not to be worth putting to the uses that men put philosophic judgments? If we need a metaphysics, will Gentile's serve us? Granted, on the other hand, that he has avoided scepticism, was that worth doing? Do we need a metaphysics, or is it necessary only to move forward step by step with the help of tentative hypotheses? In short, granted the technical uniqueness of actual idealism what is its worth? The traditional metaphysician will stand up and say: "If this is the only metaphysics that is not purely descriptive, then philosophers must still rely upon description." And the sceptic will say in his turn: "If this is the only way of avoiding scepticism, then I must remain a sceptic." Without question Gentile has shown, and to this the traditional metaphysician and the sceptic will agree each against the other, both that the traditional metaphysician can boast an adequate description but never certain knowledge and that the sceptic cannot show us how to answer significant metaphysical questions that arise in the conduct of life. To this extent both are right and to the same extent both are wrong. Gentile has shown that we are not limited in our choice to these two philosophies, but can it be shown that the third choice, which he recommends, leads to any happier function for the philosopher? Indeed, unhappy as each of the former two is in some respects, does actual idealism lead to even as happy a position? This is the final question.

Consider first a comparison of the interpretations given by the traditional metaphysics and by actual idealism of the function of philosophy. The former interprets philosophy as that science which gives a rational and self-consistent description of the real. There being a number of possible descriptions

which fulfill these requirements, the metaphysician will find something more than mere self-consistency to recommend his particular one. This recommendation may not be on the basis of adequacy, for it is also possible to have a number of self-consistent descriptions each of which will be adequate. The recommendation will be in terms of the brilliancy or discernment of the insight which is incorporated. The religious man walking by the seashore will hear the voice of God upon the waters; the scientist will hear sound waves produced by the interplay of electronic forces. One man finds in events the realization of a high purpose and judges this the best of all possible worlds; another links events by a blind concatenation and thinks his world as neither good nor bad. Some men consider themselves pawns in a game which they cannot control; others think themselves centers of free action. There are so many varieties of descriptive metaphysics that it is difficult to make statements broad enough to include them all. But it is true for all of them, even for dualism, that the *Logos* transcends the act of thinking, and therefore may be known only by immediate intuition or insight. All such doctrines consider the significant stage in philosophic research to be not the intuiting, but the reflecting upon that which is intuited. "Truth" and "reality" are given objective meanings. In accordance with these meanings there are many possible metaphysical systems, each dependent upon its immediate intuitions, each one developed consistently and each presumably adequate. But the immediate intuition is highly personal and no rational argument recommends it to others. It must be admitted that the traditional philosopher is dependent upon the insight of the poet, or upon his own insight as poet, for the material with which he shall work.

The actual idealist should not think this situation alarming. He must himself admit upon equal grounds three different types of philosophy (one his own) resulting from three differ-

ent attitudes toward the *Logos*. And he cannot avoid dependence upon poetic insight for an interpretation of the function of philosophy which shall legislate an attitude toward the *Logos*. But Gentile has been right in pointing out that in the case of the traditional metaphysician not only does this thinker make an assumption with regard to the function of philosophy and the interpretation of its fundamental concepts but, *having made this assumption,* he must again seek poetry to find that insight into the nature of things upon which he shall build his rational system. His first assumption tells him that the real transcends, or is external in relation to, thinking. At this level the actual idealist has no advantage over him. But having affirmed that "reality" shall connote the external, how, more specifically, shall he describe it? And here, unless he is to embrace mysticism, which would obviously be to beg the question, his course can only be quite arbitrary. He cannot claim a more fundamental insight than his fellow metaphysician without appealing to the very insight which he is endeavoring to defend. One is not certain that the traditional metaphysician, or any metaphysician who depends upon a *Logos* which transcends the act of thinking, always realizes the extent to which his doctrines depend upon the poetic rather than the rational function in man.

Although Gentile expresses an unmistakable disapproval of such a position, an examination of what he himself has to say shows that he simply interprets "philosophy" and "truth" and "reality" in a different way. He does not, and could not, convince his readers either that his is the only way of interpreting the philosopher's function or that it is the best way. It is quite evident that Gentile does not realize this. What he has done has been to demonstrate that he is able to begin by defining the fundamental concepts in ways supported by philosophic tradition and yet reach a metaphysical doctrine that is not dependent upon poetic insight with regard to the specific

nature of the *Logos* and which, once the definitions are accepted, is necessarily true *a priori*. One may not approve the system which he has built but one can quarrel only with Gentile's interpretation of the key-concepts. Perhaps this is not difficult, but no argument arising out of this quarrel will be fruitful. In a sense Gentile is led astray by the character of the universal and necessary judgments which he employs. They are *a priori* only at the second level. He is never aware that the force of these judgments is ultimately dependent upon his interpretation of the function of philosophy and that it is entirely possible, and indeed to be expected, that discerning philosophers will often disagree with his interpretation and therefore not find his *a priori* judgments so forceful as he thinks them to be. This is one reason why he should be more careful than he is in the use of "absurd" to describe doctrines which contradict his. If one plays the philosophic game according to Gentile's rules, doctrines which contradict his are untenable. But they are seldom absurd. There are other rules.

What will be the result of a comparison of a non-metaphysical doctrine with actual idealism? What is the difference between the sceptic's and Gentile's interpretations of the function of philosophy? Non-metaphysical philosophers interpret it chiefly as a study of the nature of knowledge and not at all as a study of the nature of reality. It is epistemological, not ontological. Indeed "reality" is for them a meaningless term in any but its most common significance. This is not to say that they have no metaphysics, but rather that their metaphysics is instrumental. They take the common-sense point of view that human beings as parts of the cosmos are confronted with other parts of it which are immediately intuitable. Their marked difference from all metaphysicians, traditional or otherwise, is illustrated by their assertion that philosophy cannot demonstrate any entity which ultimately makes thinking true or false. In other words, the *Logos* is omitted from their doc-

trine. Accordingly philosophy is the building of hypotheses with regard to the nature of the cosmos and to our acquaintance with it, and the testing of these hypotheses pragmatically as we move forward to new ones. The philosopher, for them, does not seek universal and necessary truths. Philosophy is not a science of knowledge; it is a method of procedure.

This doctrine, too, should in many ways be acceptable to the actual idealist. Knowledge for the actual idealist has the same character of tentativeness and change; philosophy involves a procedure in which each thought as *pensiero pensato* is born only to die in the act of thinking productive of the subsequent thought. But Gentile is right in pointing out that even the hypothetical method of the neo-positivist depends upon both the presupposition of some type of cosmos (e.g. uniform) and the blind acceptance of some value. If there were no presupposition as regards the cosmos there could be nothing on which to base an hypothesis. Even the theory of probability is dependent upon a basic principle which is not regarded as a pure probability. However, the cosmological presupposition of uniformity may without loss be itself regarded as an hypothesis. Perhaps there is escape from this first aspect of Gentile's charge. The problem of value is a more serious one. When we leave the realm of fact and seek guides for conduct a situation similar to that faced by the traditional metaphysician arises. That is, not only is it necessary to make an initial assumption as to the function of philosophy but there must also be the blind acceptance of a value which will give a guide for conduct. This value may be as commonplace as one could wish, but it is nevertheless accepted blindly and arbitrarily and must be so regarded in a theory of knowledge. We have again something on the second level which Gentile is able to avoid. One is not certain that the sceptic is always aware that he, or anyone who thinks and acts, is dependent upon value judgments. His scepticism makes no provision for them.

Gentile expresses an unmistakable disapproval of the position of the sceptic, too. In this case, however, the strictness of his interpretation of the function of philosophy is more severely taxed, for the neo-positivist is himself more strictly critical in his interpretation of it than the traditional metaphysician. It does not seem difficult to point out that a metaphysical hypothesis is necessary as a prelude to any action. Gentile does not, and cannot, convince his readers that this metaphysical hypothesis is dangerous. He might, though he does not, argue that the acceptance of a value which is necessary to action does imply a metaphysics that is more than hypothetical. If he raises the question of how the hypotheses are to be tested (i.e. hypotheses which involve more than mere facts, and there must be such if thinking is to be significant for future action) the answer he will get will be in terms of "common sense." But why common sense? Here, as we have seen, we encounter the arbitrary again. Gentile has shown that the function of philosophy and its initial concepts may be so interpreted that nothing arbitrary enters as regards the *Logos*. Perhaps the gain is doubtful. Gentile has shown persuasive power, but it is difficult to compete against the persuasiveness of common sense. But on the second level his absence of presuppositions gives him a definite advantage over the sceptic, who in spite of his caution seems quite clearly not to be entirely without his metaphysical doctrines. It may well be argued that common sense is an extremely poor guide for humanity.

Finally, what will be the outcome of a comparison of actual idealism with the cosmological doctrines of critical realists? Taken in and for itself, actual idealism seems to possess one major weakness and one major strength. It is in the consideration of these that this final comparison may best be made. The major weakness of actual idealism is that inherent in any solipsism. By its interpretation of the function of philosophy as thinking all things in their unity, according to a universal

and necessary knowledge, it is forced to deny metaphysical significance to the specific and independent shocks and intrusions of the cosmos. This must necessarily be so. If the known transcends the knower, as the cosmos is generally supposed to transcend the individual philosopher, it follows according to arguments already outlined at length that we cannot possess any true judgments about it. We may have a philosophically certain knowledge about thinking, and in this way create gradually a unification of reports from the various fields of human activity. But we may not have a philosophically certain knowledge about the cosmos. We may describe it poetically and we may develop hypotheses for action in it, but we may not know it philosophically. Hence cosmology plays but a minor rôle in philosophy; it systematizes the findings in the natural sciences, which are descriptions of the philosophically abstract. This is the Gentilian position. But does it not represent a serious limitation of the province of the philosopher? It may be agreed that the findings of physics with regard to the gravitational effect of one body on another, or the findings of chemistry with regard to the combination of hydrogen and oxygen atoms to form water, are not part of the material of the philosopher's workshop. Nevertheless it ought to be a part of that workshop's raw material that the gravitational effect of one body on another is what it is and waits to be discovered by the physicist in a sense in which it is not entirely possible to say that the law of gravity is created by the physicist. He may create the law as a law (the form), but he surely does not create the fact that "$1/d^2$" is a more accurate symbol in the law than "$1/d^3$" would be. And the same argument holds for any example from the field of chemistry. Yet in the Gentilian metaphysics there is no possibility of including this experience. We may say again that Gentile has so interpreted the function of philosophy that on the ground set by his interpretation we cannot quarrel with him. Yet we must add that

this interpretation is found in the end to be so inadequate in taking account of one of the most universal and convincing of human experiences that, for all its seeming merit in the initial stage, it is open to serious doubt.

This weakness is the direct result of the outstanding strength of actual idealism. In philosophy weaknesses and strengths are complementary. Whenever the philosopher gains a victory on one line of battle he seems to defeat himself on another front. Gentile's great strength is found in his conception of truth as requiring moral freedom. An unimpassioned examination of our relation to truth shows clearly what Gentile has pointed out, that in a final analysis we accept a judgment as true not because of anything transcending us but because we think it true according to standards which we, in our own freedom, have selected. Even if we judge "Edinburgh is north of London" as true, we so judge it because we are accepting settled standards as true standards. They are standards not because they are objective, but because we *as thinkers* have accepted them. Nothing that anyone tells us, no matter how great his authority or learning, is true for us until we *as thinkers* have accepted it as true. We would not value the truths we have collected if we did not recognize them as our own free acts. If we were forced to think them we could not value them as judgments. They would be thought regardless of any will on our part to think them. And furthermore, since the truth value of a judgment is ultimately dependent upon an act of thinking which is within ourselves, in the sense that we are free to think it or not to think it and are not forced to the judgment by anything transcending us, all universal and necessary judgments are in this sense created by the act of thinking. We are in a very correct sense the creators of that world which we may know universally and necessarily.

It is objected, even by Benedetto Croce, that what is here

called a strength is the greatest weakness of actual idealism. It seems to open the way to every kind of impulsive and irrational judgment in the name of truth. Is whatever a man may think, or want to think, true? Is it not rather the virtue of philosophy that it fosters unimpassioned and impersonal intellection according to the rules of reason? Gentile has questioned this customary attitude by arguing that intellection according to the rules of reason is thinking in a circle, wherein one arrives just where one started. He has brought to its most fundamental application, in the field of logic, a principle first recognized and respected by Plato in ethics, in spite of his ridicule of Protagoras' relativism of sensation. Plato contended that no man desires to act toward evil rather than good. Nor did Plato stop there. He even argued, upon occasion, that no man desires to think the false rather than the true.[2] But neither he nor Epictetus, who remembered those arguments and approved them,[3] saw the full application of the principle to an interpretation of knowledge and of reality. They were too busy thinking in terms of presupposed metaphysical systems. Just as every man's actions are good to himself, so every man's thinking is true to himself. Man's thinking is the measure of all things, even of the most fundamental of all things, itself. The realization of this is the backbone of Gentile's philosophy. Whatever a man *thinks,* he thinks as true; there still remains the possibility of distinguishing truth from opinion.

The weakness is a product of the strength and the strength a product of the weakness. They form a dichotomy which prevents our retaining both the strength of actual idealism and the strength of a cosmology. Philosophy must renounce either its search for a universal and necessary truth according to the most strict requirements, or certain knowledge of anything

[2] E g., *Protagoras* 357 and *Sophist* 230.
[3] *The Discourses of Epictetus.* Opening of Chapter XXVIII of Book One.

transcending the act of thinking. The general nature of this crisis is not new to philosophy. It was faced specifically by Hume; and he gave the answer from deep in his heart that philosophy's pride in a universal and necessary knowledge must take a fall. But the crisis is new in this sense, that Gentile has developed an interpretation of the function of philosophy, based upon the synthetic judgment *a priori,* that would seem to be the only possible interpretation of it which will allow a necessary and universal philosophic knowledge according to the most strict requirements. He has in this sense completed the task begun by Kant. Was it worth completing? The question that remains is whether or not Gentile's actual idealism has enough strength to overcome its weakness, in view of its ability to give us that type of knowledge for which philosophers have continually sought. If we insist on interpreting the function of philosophy as giving a strictly universal and necessary knowledge, then Gentile's *Sistema di logica* seems to suggest the only doctrine at present open to human beings. If we are prone to accept a philosophy which boasts a cosmology, we shall search in another direction. But this problem is one to which philosophy itself is not eligible to give any final answer.

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This is actual idealism; its nature, its apologia, and its embarrassments. Why give it so much attention? Why try to force it upon a world which has been so impatient with it? Surely it surpasses all other doctrines in the difficulties encountered in endeavoring to understand it. It is almost impossible to express it accurately in black and white. It rejects summarily every theory of the nature of truth that man has thus far devised. It contradicts even the most secure tenets of common sense; without so much as excusing itself for doing

so it pushes aside every empirical study of the cosmos as non-philosophical. It is the black sheep of the family and seems to exhibit no qualms of conscience or even alarm at its isolation. Solipsism! That epithet has been the bogey man of every philosopher's tale for many centuries. On rare occasions the critic in sheer exasperation at the weaknesses of his more conventional adversaries has let fall a word in praise of the consistency of the solipsist. But these few are the only kind words that have ever been said.

One might picture actual idealism as a cone in unstable equilibrium, balanced between the regions of traditional metaphysics and the scepticism of neo-positivism. Of no other doctrine can it be said as truly as of actual idealism that it maintains its position out of sheer unwillingness to accept the difficulties inherent in the doctrines which surround it. Its very reason for being is found in these difficulties, and any thorough history of it or description of it must begin with a consideration of these other doctrines for, to change the metaphor momentarily, it is a modern building built not out of new bricks but out of bricks which have already been used to build older structures declared to be unsatisfactory. A cone in unstable equilibrium can fall to the right, or to the left, or directly forward (or backward); or it may remain on its point. There are only these possibilities from which to choose. The philosopher may be a traditional metaphysician; whether realist, critical realist, or objective idealist. Or he may reject all metaphysics and think of himself as the logical clarifier of empirical hypotheses. Or he may be an actual idealist. Or he may find some way of avoiding the first two possibilities which has not yet transpired. There is no other choice. Gentile's position is admittedly unstable. Half of his doctrine exerts a force which tries to bring him down into the region of the traditional metaphysician; the other half tries to make him fall among the sceptics. The overhang of the cone represents the

elements in his doctrine in common with each, metaphysics and scepticism; and the instability of his equilibrium represents his apparent vulnerability to the attacks of his adversaries. But the forces are equal and opposite and he remains where he is. Why this feat of balance?

The traditional metaphysician is dependent upon immediate intuition. As both sceptic and actual idealist charge, he is chiefly a poet. He makes an arbitrary and intuitive selection from experience of what he thinks to be most significant. Is this the best of all possible worlds? Press Leibniz on this point and you find only a hunch. Is the world to be explained solely in terms of physical entities and the blind forces upon which they operate? Again, only a hunch. Is all reality gathered up into an Absolute which humans may approach but never fully understand? How did Hegel know? All of these descriptions come out of initial presuppositions and, when the system is complete, we are in possession of nothing that was not there at the beginning. And what was there at the beginning? Nothing but a poetic insight, about which no argument is possible. Philosophers have always argued, and they have argued because of a conviction that argument fans the flame of knowledge. But the poet stands alone, inaccessible to other minds; and in a significant sense he is the severest solipsist of them all. We cannot accept the position of the traditional metaphysician because of a conviction that the philosopher deals with certain knowledge, not poetry. That is why Gentile does not yield to the one side and, after what modern logic has taught us about deductive systems, his reason may not be denied—unless philosophy loses its identity in poetry. And then philosophy goes out of existence.

The neo-positivist is dependent upon empirical observation and the logical clarification which philosophic argument gives it. Upon this observation, and with the aid of logical clarification, the hypotheses of which knowledge consists are built.

Admittedly this limits knowledge to a consideration of facts; past, present, and future. But what are we to *do* about facts? There is a whole sphere in which man seeks answers to questions of value, that of the direction of human activity. If the logician and scientist take one step out of the laboratory they face these questions. Indeed, unless they are playing an intellectual game which has no real significance, the very fact of their remaining in the laboratory means that they are acting in terms of values. This is undeniable. No matter how many or how ingenious their hypotheses, they must somehow be tested in terms of non-hypothetical values. The neo-positivist may take the position that problems of value (i.e. any other than those of fact) are answerable only by descriptive and arbitrary hunches. But this is hardly credible. We do not know very much, but we do know that certain standards of value are better than others. We know that it is significant whether mankind takes this direction or that. We are not like the cat that walked by itself. The only other position open to the neo-positivist is the appeal to common sense in the selection of ultimate value. We want to live, and to live comfortably. It is difficult to know how to answer this except by saying that eminent men have come along, from Plato to Gentile, and said that there are higher goals for man than survival or physical comfort. Is mere survival, the being born and the drawing of breath and dying, good in itself? Is physical comfort intrinsically desirable? Is not life given us for the valuable things we can do with it? Is not physical comfort desirable as that condition which makes attainment on another scale possible? We are, indeed, coming more and more to the realization that survival and physical comfort are conflicting aims, that modern civilization is biologically detrimental. In the end it is survival that is basic to the neo-positivist's value structure. Yet when we think of the lives of Socrates and St. Francis and Erasmus and Gandhi mere survival becomes entirely empty.

The philosopher must accept the problem of value. This is why Gentile does not yield to the other side.

If this argument is correct, the problem of value is a meaningful one. The neo-positivist might go so far as to admit this, but stand firm nevertheless in the conviction that no matter how meaningful the problem of value it must be left to the poet. We have said that this seems hardly credible. It has been the contribution of actual idealism to demonstrate that so complete a scepticism is not tenable. Gentile has accepted the problem of value, and shown at the same time that as a philosopher, not a poet, he is able to give an answer to it. It has been said with almost tiresome repetition from Plato to Schlick that it would be imperative for a consistent solipsist to preserve an unbroken silence. But is not the situation the exact opposite? Is not Gentile the only one who *may* speak? The traditional metaphysician is a poet, expressing his own private and immediate intuitions. As a *poet* he may share them with others, but as a philosopher his judgments lack significance for others because these utterances may lay no claim to being contributions to knowledge. And the neo-positivist? So long as he remains within the narrow sphere of the empirical, so long as he is only a laboratory assistant, he may lay claim to a limited type of knowledge. But when he faces problems in that wider sphere in which we endeavor to know what to do with these empirical data, he maintains that there are no answers and must resign himself to the silence of the sceptic.

But can we accept Gentile's doctrine that only thinking is real? Are not other men, and external objects, real? Of course they are in the usual sense. Actual idealism talks as much about the things of which we think as any other doctrine. It accepts naïve realism, in its place. It enfolds all of the common sense that thinkers have for centuries respected. It does not deny it its contribution but only tries to bring together this contribution and all of the others made by human thinking.

Actual idealism has this advantage over every other solipsism that it, while ontologically logocentric, accepts the empirical existence of your body, your friends, the chair in which you are sitting, and the sun which is shining in at your window. Perhaps its greatest strength is its comprehensiveness. The traditional metaphysician has always fallen prey to the evil of over-emphasis—he has run his poetic hunch into the ground by trying to describe all of human experience in terms of only a part of it. This is probably an accurate account of all traditional metaphysics from materialism to absolute idealism. But actual idealism brings in all significances, poetic, religious, and scientific; and insists that each play its rôle in the whole. But it is only the whole that it has been willing to call philosophical. The study of the cosmos is not unimportant because it represents but one aspect of human thinking.

The difficulty encountered in thinking of the cosmos as created by the act of thinking is deceptive. We do without revulsion hear it said that the "realities" of religion are so created. Since the time of Kant, the philosopher has been willing to entertain seriously the idea that God is created by man, rather than man created by God. We do not find it hard to understand what this means. But close consideration of the problem will show that the situation in the field of religion is essentially parallel to that in the natural sciences. Religion would be pointless were it not that God and the moral law are taken to be objective in relation to us, as representative of something to which the individual should submit. But this does not prevent our understanding of them as concepts developed in the history of human thought, as created by human thinking rather than existing in and for themselves. Precisely in the same manner the natural sciences would be pointless were it not that the cosmos is taken to be objective in relation to us. The cosmos is no more real than God, and no less. In this latter case, then, it should not be difficult to understand the

cosmos as a concept created by the act of thinking. We should be quite as willing to entertain seriously the idea that man created nature. That we are not willing to do this may be a fair indication that we have thought more clearly in the field of religion than we yet have in the field of natural science.

The danger in philosophy has always been, and this actual idealism makes more clear than any previous metaphysics has done, that one field of study should try to enfold the others. When the religious man has tried to deny the scientist his work, or the scientist denied the poet his, then man has become inexcusably narrow. Actual idealism is humanism *par excellence*. Humanism recognizes that all knowledge and all action are *human* knowledge and *human* action, and constantly endeavors to embrace them all in the common goal of *Bildung zur Humanität*. The doctrine that only the act of thinking is real is the broadest rather than the narrowest of doctrines. Poetry, because it is the expression of the inner self, has always been human. Since the time of Spinoza and Leibniz we have humanized religion, and the gain to our understanding has been incalculable. When the final fortress has fallen, when science has been humanized and taken its true and important place in human life and given up the claim to be everything, then humanism will be supreme. Then philosophy will exhibit that harmony and temperance which are its very soul.

# APPENDIX

# A GENTILE BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Appendix

# A GENTILE BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is an attempt to unite, complete, and bring up to date previous bibliographies. Every detail of which we are in possession that might aid a student of Gentile is included. Many recent articles not listed will be found in Gentile's own review, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana.* Others have appeared in *La Critica, Levana, Educazione fascista, L'educazione nazionale, Rivista pedagogica, La nuova politica liberale* (in 1925 changed to *Educazione politica*), *La nuova scuola media,* and *I nuovi doveri.* Fratelli Treves, in Milan, is undertaking to publish Gentile's complete works.

## A. *The Writings of Giovanni Gentile*

A star (*) indicates that the work is of interest to the present study.
A dagger (†) indicates that the work is important to the present study
A double dagger (‡) indicates that the work is essential to the present study.

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# INDEX


*A*=*A*, 59ff, 145–6, 169–70.
Absolute, Hegelian, 5, 6, 8, 98, 162, 241, also 89, 226.
Abstract, use of word, 13, 16, 58, 59; entities, 175. *See* Logic.
Absurd, use of word, 136.
Act of thinking, the only real, 8–9, 10–16, 46, 138–9, 171, 201–2, 205, 243–5, *see* Nature and Solipsism; character of, *see Pensiero pensante;* Fact, Unity
Actual idealism, advantage of, 244; and dualism, 202; and empirical individual, 175–6; and problem of multiplicities, 10; character of, 3, 8, 24, 31, 137, 166, 167, 225, 239–240; comprehensiveness of, 244; contribution of, 239; historical place of x, 3–8; humanism of, 10, 245; greatest obstacle facing, 105; immanentism of, 9, 41, 127; relation to Italians, xiv; morality of, 21; most serious difficulty facing, 185; place of, 229, 239–45; quest of, 16; strength and weakness of, 237–8; uniqueness of, 163. *See* Cone; Critical realism; Neo-positivism; Realism, Scepticism; Traditional metaphysics.
Actualism, of actual idealism, 4, 21–2, 178
*Affermazione, affermante* and *affermato,* 60.
Affirmation, two ways of considering, 60
Alexander, *Time, Space and Deity,* 180 n 22
Analysis, 141, 159–60, 227–8 (summary); of judgment, 64–7.
Anything and everything, 163–4.
*A priori,* character of truth, 41–2, 45; of G's basic judgment, 205–6.
Ardigò, 10
Aristotle, categories, 97–9; knowledge, 83, 112; logic, 139, 145, 162; matter, 187–8; also 77, 142, 209.
Art, a stage in dialectic, 17–18, 101; status of, 101–2. *See* Poet; Poetry.
Assumptions, and presuppositions, 117, 142, 227.
Atomists, 162.
*Aufklarungszeit,* 27.
Autoconcept, 102–3.
*Autonoema,* 90, 91, 93.
Autosyllogism, 93–4.
Autosynthesis, 95.
Avenarius, 119.

Bacon, Francis, 162.
Beauty, illusiveness of, 18.
Becoming, 49, 87.
Being, 48; and thought, 63; criticism of thought as Being in logic of abstract, 145–6, 226 (summary).
Berkeley, and G, 31; 12, 40. *See Esse est percipi.*
*Bildung zur Humanität,* 28, 245.
Blumberg, 204 n 1, 215, 220.
Body, problem of, 195–6.
Brain, 97.
Burnett, on *Logos,* 34.

Carnap, 203, 204.
Carr, xiv, xvi.
Categories, 97–101, 160–1.
Catholic philosophers, and G., 10.
Certainty, and knowledge, 44–5, 46; quest for, 162, 199, 229.
Circularity of thought, 62–3, 77, 80. *See* Desire for the circle.
Classic problems of philosophy, handled by actual idealism, 161.
Clocks, example of, 201.
*Cogito ergo sum,* 44–5, 82, 172, 176. *See* I think, therefore I am.
Coherence theory of truth, and G's theory, 220.
Common sense, 12, 114, 218, 235, 242.
Concept, 72; impossibility of avoiding, 106–7, 175.
Concrete, use of word, 13, 59, 68 n. 20, 77. *See* Logic.

Cone, example of, 240–1.
Copernican revolution in philosophy, 82, 98.
Cosmological question, 188ff; as indictment of G's metaphysics, 200–1.
Cosmology, place of, 189, 197, 236.
Cosmos, reality of, 235–6, 243–5. *See* Nature.
*Cratilus,* 126.
Creativity of subject, 10, 83, 115, 150, 236, 244; of form, 193.
Critical realism, 114, 177, 179, 185, 235–6.
Criticisms, of *Sistema di logica,* 142, 146–7, 151–2, 158–9, 159–60, 226–8 (summary); of G's terminology, Chap. VI, 225 (summary)
*Critique of Pure Reason,* 136.
Croce, and G, xi, xii, 7–8; criticism of G., 237–8.

Deduction, 156–7. *See* Circularity.
Descartes, and G, 31; and error, 50; and innate ideas, 39; also 44, 81, 82, 176. *See Cogito ergo sum;* I think, therefore I am
Description, philosophy as, 179, 180–1, 230–1, 241.
Desire for the circle, 80, 106.
Dewey, 211
Dialectic, criticism of G's, 172–4; Fichte and G, 31; Hegelian, 5, 162; logic of, 162, three stages in, 17–20; truth of, 150–6
Dialectizing of concept, 102–3.
Difference-relation, 84.
*Differentia,* 72.
Discipline, 23.
Dogmatic, use of word, 135–6.
Dogmatism, 81.
Dual character of actual idealism, 24.
Dualism, 201–2; of body and soul, 195–6.

Education, 106; philosophy of, 26–9; and concept of truth and error, 51–52.
Ego, compared to light, 86; G's use of, 157–8; G's use of criticized, 168–76, 226 (summary); of Fichte, 5; Perry and, 167–8, two Ego's, 86–7, 173.
*Ego=Ego,* 79, 85, 169–70, 171.
*Ego=Not-Ego,* 84–5, 86, 173.
Egocentric predicament, 113, 163ff.; G's avoidance of Perry's charge, 165–6.
Ego makes itself Ego, 85, 172.
Eleatics, 61.
Empirical individual, 175–6. *See* Other men.
Empiricism, 40.
Epictetus, 238.
Epicurus, 66.
Erasmus, 242.
Error, concept of, 50–5, 76; use of word, 125–30.
*Esse est percipi,* 31, 105.
Essence, 177–9.
Eternity of truth, 49–50.
Ethics, of G., 219–20.
Excluded Middle, Principle of, 61–2; and syllogism, 69; metaphysical use of, 63–4; metaphysical use of criticized, 145–6, 226 (summary).
Existence, 177–9.
External relations, doctrine of, 139–140, 201.

Fact, 9, 25–6, 37, 45, 67, 76, 218.
Faith, and knowledge, 43–5.
Feigl, 204 n. 1, 215, 220.
Fichte, and G., 4–5, 31; also, ix, 6, 7, 17, 119.
Fiorentino, x.
Form, 83, 93, 186ff, 193–5.
Forms of judgment. *See* Judgment.
Freedom, 23, 91–2. *See* Spinoza.
Function of philosophy. *See* Philosophy.
Fundamental law of logic of concrete, 84–5.
Fundamental principles of logic of abstract, 59–62, 147.

Galileo, 197.
Galluppi, ix, xv.
Gandhi, 216, 242.
Gentile, life of, xi–xiv; problem of, 119–20.
*Genus,* 72.
German idealism, compared to Italian, xiv–xv; and G., 6–7. *See* Kant; Fichte; Hegel.
Gioberti, x, xi, xv, 111.
God, concept of, 10, 18, 19, 244; in example, 66.
Gorgias, 192.
*Gorgias,* 4.
Grammar, 65–6.
Gravitational force, example of, 236.

Heart, 97.
Hegel, and G, 5–6; also ix, x, xi, xii, xv, 7, 98, 160, 162, 241.
Hegelians, 6, 138
Heraclitus, 34, 87.
Herder, 27.
History, philosophy of, 24–6
Human beings, status of, 14–15. *See* Other men.
Humanism of actual idealism, 10, 20, 21, 245.
Human activity, major phases of, 17; three stages of development of, 101 *See* Art, Religion, Science; Philosophy.
Humanities, 28–9.
Humboldt, von, 27
Hume, 40, 239.
Hylozoists, 19.
Hypothetical knowledge, and neo-positivism, 216, and problem of value, 214, 216–17, 241–2.

I am nature, 79, 169–70
Idealism, characterized by G, 83; G's definition of, 186; ontological, 163; Perry's three types of, 166–7. *See* Actual idealism
Identity, Principle of, 59–60; subjective and objective, 85.
Identity-relation, 59–60, 64–5.
Immanent *Logos,* 41.
Immanentism, of actual idealism, 9, 41, 127.
Immediate, knowledge, 43–5, 166; intuition, 116-17, 166; use of word, 157 n 16 *See* Faith; Mediate; Presupposition.
Independence of nature and real. *See* Nature; Real
Individual, and state, 23–4; unaccounted for in actual idealism, 175–176
Induction, 71; logic of, 162.
*In interiore homine,* of society and state, 22–3
Internal relations, doctrine of, 139–140, 201.
Internationalism, 22–3.
Intuition *See* Immediate
I think . . . , 35, 45, 48, 88, 156; for neo-positivist and idealist, 217.
I think, therefore I am, 31, 34. *See Cogito ergo sum.*
I think, therefore thinking is, 31, 172.
I think I think, therefore I am, 44.

Jaja, x, xii.
James, 161, 199.
Joad, 6, 7
Johnson, Samuel, 12.
Judgment, analysis of, 64; as synthesis, 66, forms of abstract, 68; forms of concrete, 92.
Justin, 34.

Kant, and G., 3–4, 239; and the categories, 98–9, 160, 162; and knowledge, 40, 162, 186, dualism of, 202; form and matter, 186–7; pure and practical reason, 4, 47; subjective element in, 82, synthetic judgment *a priori,* 239; religion, 244; also ix, xv, 9 n 2, 63 n 9.
Knowledge, and faith, 43–5; use of word, 125; definition of for neo-positivist, 203–4. *See* Philosophy; Truth.
Know thyself, 91.

*La scienza nuova,* ix.
Law, and liberty, 24, 91–2. *See* Moral law; Natural law
Leibniz, and problem of the individual, 176, used as example, 36, 241; also 63 n. 9, 100, 245.
Levels of presuppositions *See* Presuppositions
Liberty, and law, 24, 91–2.
Logocentric predicament, 9, 177.
*Logos,* attempts to avoid transcendent, 39–40, defined, 34–5, immanent, 41, 127; transcendent, 36–7; three doctrines with regard to, 228–9; two types of, 126.
Logic, abstract, 16, 58–9, 73, 88; abstract and concrete, 59, 78, 82, 88, 147–9, 156–7; transition from abstract to concrete, 77–9, of contradictories, 16, Hegelian, 17; noetic and relational, 33, 144–5; G's definition of, 32–3. *See* Metaphysics

Maeterlinck, 123.
Man is the measure of all things, 31, 111.
Man's thinking is the measure of all things, 238.
Materialist, and G., 129, 131.

Matter, 83, 93, 186ff, 193–5.
Meaningfulness, of metaphysics, 209ff; of actual idealism, 218; of real, 212; of synthetic judgments *a priori*, 211.
Mediate, knowledge, 43–5, 166; use of word, 157 n. 16, 166.
Mediacy of thinking, 44–5, 48; of truth, 47–8.
Metaphysics, G's not analytic, 208–9; uniqueness of G's, 183; meaningfulness of, 209–10, 218, two realms open to, 196, and logic identified, 33–5, 77, 94–5; in logic of abstract, *see* Excluded Middle, and scepticism, 201. *See* Traditional metaphysics.
Metaphysical judgments, synthetic *a priori* character of, 207–9.
Methodological difficulty, 113, 163, 164–6. *See* Egocentric predicament; Perry.
*Monadology*, 36
Morality of truth, 42–3, 46–7, 91, 237.
Moral law, 10, 19, 244.
Multiplicities, problem of, 10–16. *See* Nature; Cosmos; Unity.
Mysticism, 125, 232.

Nationalism, 22–3.
Natural science, status of, 16, 101, 189–91, 212–14, 244–5; as a stage in dialectic, 18–20, 101; neo-positivism and actual idealism on status of, 236, truth for, 128.
Natural law, 10, 11, 191, 244; neo-positivism and actual idealism on status of, 236.
Nature, status of, 10, 15–16, 168, 169–170; objects of, 14; independence of, 114; 188ff., 193–4, 197; indictment of G's concept of, 193–7; reality of, 243–5; use of word, 64 n 11.
*Nature=Nature*, 79.
Necessity, a criterion of truth, 35; of predicate, 66–7; of synthetic judgments *a priori*, 94–5; of dialectic, 151–2; use of word, 66 n 15, 132.
Negation, involved in any affirmation, 60; use of word, 59 n. 2, 104.
Neo-positivist, and metaphysics, 115, 203ff., 210–11; and the function of philosophy, 214–15, 233–5; use of hypothetical judgments, 215–16; and problem of value, 217–18, 243; and problem of knowledge, 241–2; and actual idealist, 211, 217–18; and synthetic judgments *a priori*, 207–208.
*Neuhumanismus*, 27, 28.
*Noema*, 90, 93.
Noetic logic, 33–4, 144–5.
Non-contradiction, Principle of, 61.
*Norma sui* character of concrete judgments, 42, 89, 94–5; criticism of, 151–2, 227 (summary).
Not-Being, 48.
Not-Ego, compared to shadow, 86; place in dialectic, 168, 170, 173; necessity to dialectic, 194; G's use of criticized, 174.
Noumenon, 4, 6, 8, 40, 82 n. 12, 98, 114, 197, 202, 226.
Noun, 65–6.

Oak tree, example of, 8.
Object, universality of, 124; thought as, 64. *See Pensiero pensato.*
Official meter, example of, 38.
Ontological argument, 178.
Ontological idealism. *See* Idealism.
Opinion, 36.
Opposition, two types in logic, 61.
Other men, status of, 14–15, 137–8, 243.
Ought of thinking, 45.

Parmenides, 34, 48, 126, 148, 149.
*Parmenides*, 189.
Part, and whole, 12, 159, 228. *See* Analysis
Particular, universalized in induction, 71; status of, 195.
Particular judgments, problem of in dialectic, 152; of Aristotle, 66 n. 16.
Particularity, of object as one condition of thought, 124; of subject, 66–7.
*Pensiero pensante*, 46, 58, 75, 148; takes place of Ego in dialectic, 158, 173ff, 226 (summary); *norma sui* character of, 227 (summary); necessity of, 150–3; universality of, 153–4; value of, 154–6; and form, 187. *See* Act of thinking.
*Pensiero pensato*, 46, 58, 75, 148, 158; takes place of Not-Ego in dialectic, 173ff; necessity and universality and value of, 156; and matter, 187. *See* Fact; Nature; Cosmos.

Perry, and egocentric predicament, 163, 177; criticism of, 164; G's avoidance of his charge, 165–6; ontological idealism, 163; and self, 167; three types of idealism outlined by, 167; also 176, 179.
Philo, 34.
Philosopher, three paths open to, 118–119, 240.
Philosophic thought, two conditions of, 124
Philosophy, defined by G, 122–3; function of, 12, 124, 245, 238–9; realist's concept of function of, 182, 198; critical realist's concept of function of, 198–9, neo-positivist's concept of function of, 214–15; traditional metaphysician and actual idealist on function of, 230–3, neo-positivist and actual idealist on function of, 233–5; critical realist and actual idealist on function of, 236, a stage in the dialectic, 20–1, 101–2; approach to in neo-positivism and actual idealism, 208–9.
Plato, and theory of knowledge, 35, 81, 83, 143, 162, 238, and Protagoras, 111–12; and subjective *Logos*, 126; early P and G, 189, as an historical individual, 25, 76; also 73, 100, 119, 209, 242, 243.
Poet, 241, 243
Poetry, 83, 149.
Point moving, example in logic of concrete, 77
Positivists, Italian, and G., 10.
Predicament. *See* Egocentric predicament.
Predicate, necessary and universal, 66–7.
Presuppositions, 116–17; none in actual idealism, 137–43; criticism of G's use of word, 143; different levels of, 141–2, 206–7, 209, 227 (summary), 232–5; and realism, 181–2. *See* Assumptions; Theory of Types.
Progress in logic of concrete, 80, 96, 148–9.
Protagoras, and G., 31, 40–1; and solipsism, 111–12; also 82 n. 12, 238.
Psychology, status of, 190; and problem of knowledge, 212–13.
Pupil, and teacher, 28, 52–5, 106.
Pure, use of word, 58 n. 1.
Purity of truth, 41–2.
Radio City, 213–14.
Rationalism, 39.
Rational world, 138–9.
Real, use of word, 123–5, 134, 196, 68 n. 20; and apparent, 124; independence of for realist, 180; meaningfulness of, 212. *See* Act of thinking.
Reality, of external objects, 243–4; and the factual, 216. *See* Cosmos; Nature.
Realist, presuppositions of, 180ff, 198; and idealist, 179; and truth, 183–4.
Reason, 97. *See* Kant.
Relational logic, 33–5, 144–5.
Religion, as stage in dialectic, 18–20, 101; status of, 101–2, 244–5.
Rosmini, ix, x, xv.
Royce, problem of other men, 137; and Perry, 165; logocentricism, 177; and G. on problem of essence, 178.

St. Francis, 242.
Salvemini, xii.
Santayana, and G., 177; animal faith and cosmos, 179; critical of idealism's doctrine of nature, 185; also 119, 178, 189 n. 5.
Scepticism, 81; and metaphysics in history of philosophy, 200; of G., 130, 132; and actual idealism, 118, 229–30. *See* Neo-positivist.
Schelling, ix.
Schlick, 203, 243.
Science. *See* Natural science.
Self, Perry and, 167; also 112 n. 2.
Self-awareness, importance of, 172–3, 174.
Self-determination of concrete thought, 82. *See Norma sui.*
Self-expression, 17–18.
*Sistema di logica,* significance of, xv, 30, 229, 239; criticisms of, 225–8 (summary). *See* Criticism.
Society, 22.
Socrates, 34, 48, 91, 111, 242.
Solipsism, of G., 112, 117–18; use of word, 112 n. 2; attitudes toward, 113–16, 240; status of, 243–4; strength of G's, 200; weakness inherent in any, 235–6.
*Sommario di pedagogia,* 190 n. 6 and 7, 219.
Spaventa, ix, x.

Specific judgments in science, 194–5, 197.
Spinoza, and G, 31; dualism of, 202; also 49, 100, 245.
Spinozan freedom, 21, 138.
Spirit, use of word, 23 n 3.
State and individual, 23–4.
Stoics, 34.
Subject, contingent and particular, 66–7.
Subjective element, in knowledge, 38–41, 186; in concrete logic, 79; in truth, 130.
Syllogism, 69–70, 156.
*Symposium,* 44
Synthesis, 141, 159–60, 227–8 (summary); of judgment, 66
Synthetic character of G's metaphysical judgments, 207.
Synthetic judgments *a priori,* necessity and *norma sui* character of, 94–5; importance to G, 188, 205; and knowledge, 203–5; possibility of, 207–9, meaningfulness of, 211; logic of, 162.

Teacher, and pupil, 28, 52–5, 106
*Teoria dello spirito,* significance of, xvi.
*Theaetetus,* 33, 35, 49, 111, 112
Theory of Types, 140, 207, 211.
Thinkable, use of word, 225.
Thought, use of word, 225; and Being, 63; criticism of thought as Being in logic of abstract, 145–6, 226 (summary); postulated as determined, 191–2; concreteness of, 155–6; circularity of abstract, 62–63, 77, 80, as object, 64.
*Timaeus,* 189.
Totality of the thinkable as definition of reality, 12, 123, 141, 181, 209
Traditional metaphysics, 181, 241, 243; and actual idealism, 117–18, 229–33.
Transcendent, use of word, 9 n. 2; *Logos,* 36–7; three consequences of transcendent *Logos,* 37.
Transcendental, Ego, 98; in Kantian sense, 99–100.
Truth, three criteria of, 35; G's three conclusions regarding, 38–41; purity of, 41–2, mediacy of, 47–8; morality of, 42–3; eternity of, 49–50; and error, 50–5, 76; use of word, 125–30, 225 (summary); two kinds for G, 128–9; criteria of applied to dialectic, 151–6; for realism and idealism, 183–4; coherence theory of, 220; concept of as G's greatest strength, 237; for natural science, 128.

Undefined concepts, 193
Unity, of concrete thought, 87, 140–141, criticism of G's emphasis on unity of act of thinking, 159–60, 195, 227–8 (summary).
Universality, a criterion of truth, 35; of particulars in induction, 71; use of word, 66 n 16, 132; of dialectic, 153–4; of object as one condition of thought, 124.
Unthinkability, use of word, 130–2.

Value, a criterion of truth, 35, 134; of dialectic, 154–5; problem of, 214, 216, 242–3; and neo-positivist, 217–218; ethical, 219.
Vera, x.
Verb, 65–6.
Vico, ix, xi, xiv, 22

Watch, example of, 12–14.
Wittgenstein, 203, 204, 215.
Whole, and parts, 12, 159. *See* Synthesis.