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THE OBJECTIVE VALIDITY OF THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTRADICTION.¹

EDWARD CONZE, Ph.D.

I. THE PROBLEM AND ITS JUSTIFICATION

THE present essay is intended as a contribution to the investigation of the relations between the theoretical and the practical life of man. It makes the attempt to show that our assumption or rejection of even the highest and most abstract law of thought and reality is based on and rooted in our practical attitude towards the world. It tries to show that even the principle of contradiction (P.C.) owes its validity or non-validity to decisions made by the practical and emotional part of man, and that the objective validity of the P.C. is not absolute, but that it is relative to the practical and emotional attitude you choose to assume.

First leaving on one side the question, what the P.C. exactly means and in which sense we speak of its "validity," we must show at the very outset of this essay in what sense the P.C. can be at all a subject-matter for discussion. How can the P.C. be a matter of any earnest discussion, since it is generally considered to be beyond all discussion? In what sense can it afford a problem, since it seems to be an indubitable and undeniable truth? But, on the other hand, whether the P.C. *can* be denied or not, it *has* been denied in the course of the history of human thinking. Aristotle, in his still unsurpassed and valid discussion of the P.C. in the third book of the *Metaphysics* maintains that practically *all* his predecessors *denied* the P.C. Later on we find that eminent thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa, Hegel, Bostroem, Bradley, and others in Europe, the Taoists in China, the Madhyamikas in India denied the validity of the P.C. in one way or another. Lévy-Bruhl made at least an attempt to show that the P.C. is not observed by "primitive" mentality. Svend Ranulf demonstrated the same for the Eleatic methods of thinking. How can these historical facts be reconciled with the assumption of logicians that the P.C. is beyond all doubt and dispute? Is it possible to account for these deviators from the P.C. with an impatient wave of the hand, assuming that these thinkers have been utterly wrong, unable to grasp the fundamental condition of all thinking about realities? Or how is this radical difference of opinion to be reconciled?

¹ Throughout this article for "principle of contradiction" the abbreviation "P.C." is used.

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Perhaps it may be useful in this dilemma to examine the reasons on which Aristotle and all his direct or indirect disciples based their claim that the P.C. must be considered as a principle standing high above all dispute.

First it has been said that the P.C. can neither be proved nor refuted because it is *self-evident*. A truth is considered to be self-evident if it is immediately, that is without the intervention of any proof or deduction, perceived by reason to be indubitably true and known by itself. It is not difficult to see that no mere psychic state of belief, be it as unshaken as it may, can be sufficient to assure us of the fact that we are in immediate touch with truth and reality as such. Unfortunately a wrong idea may be as self-evident as a true one. So many "self-evident" propositions have been shattered in the history of human thought that alleged "self-evidence" cannot be considered to be any ultimate guarantee of truth. Recourse to it cannot exclude the discussion of a problem. "Self-evidence" of a proposition can never exclude the possibility that a more satisfactory self-evident proposition about the same object may arise. Just the *substitution* of self-evident propositions for each other forms one of the main elements of the development of human thought.

More serious is the second contention: the P.C. cannot be proved or refuted, being the unspoken *condition* of all proof, in this sense, that if it is denied, all proof is denied. Even those who deny the P.C. confirm it by denying it, for they assume denial not to be the same as affirmation, else they would take no pains to deny it. This argumentation in fact excludes the possibility of a complete denial of the P.C. But it leaves open the possibility of *limiting* the *extent* of the validity of the P.C. It leaves open the possibility that not *all* objects may be on the same level as regards the P.C. Let us now call A the class of things for which the P.C. is valid and let us call B the class of things for which it is not valid. Then A may be *subordinated* to B. Under the assumption of different degrees of truth the lower degrees may observe the P.C., but not the higher. The P.C. would be the necessary condition of all arguments concerning A, but it would be abolished at the threshold of B, although leading to it. So for the German romantics (Novalis, Schlegel, etc.), for Schelling and Hegel the P.C. is observed only by the lower logic of the *Verstand*, whereas the higher logic of speculative reason rejects it. In a similar spirit, Nicholas of Cusa declared four hundred years earlier that the P.C. is the first principle only of the lower discursive reason, "limited by the contradictories," i.e. of the first step towards truth, but it has no validity for the higher, truer, and infinite faculty, for the "most simple and detached" faculty of the *docta ignorantia*, of the *intellectio videntium*. Besides, there exists another possibility: A and B can be *co-ordinated*; for one part of the world the

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P.C. may be valid, but not for another; human thought, which surveys them both, may then belong to that part for which the P.C. is valid.

The two lines of argument mentioned above attempted simply to exclude any discussion about the validity of the P.C. This is not the case with other more modern forms of argument, which regard the P.C. either as an outcome of the generalization of the data of *experience* or as the necessary condition of all fruitful *practical* behaviour. This nominalistic and pragmatistic "proof" of the P.C. can never exclude *a priori* the possibility that either new data of experience or that a new fruitful practical attitude may appear, which would exclude the P.C.

II. THE FORMULATION OF THE P.C.

The P.C. may be stated as the psychological fact that mind or consciousness, owing to their nature and constitution, *cannot* actually judge at the same time that a thing is, and that the same thing is not. But logical theory is not concerned with the question, if in fact the P.C. is thoroughly observed in actual thinking, or if there are exceptions to it. But the logician, in case he should find contradictions in the actual thinking-process, would point out that these are cases of wrong thinking, that they are instances of a thinking which is not quite clear and distinct, that they are cases in which reason has not been able to overcome the obstacles of irrational tendencies, etc. Logical theory assumes the P.C. to be not the principle of all judgment, but of all *true* judgment only.

But what reason can be given for this assumption? *Why* can we call true only reasoning processes which observe the P.C.? I can see only one satisfactory reason for this, namely that the P.C. is also the principle of the *objects* of judgment and reasoning. The P.C. is a principle of true judgment, because it is a principle of objects, of reality. The laws of reality are the fundamentals of the laws of the logical mind. We cannot *judge* that the same man is learned and is also not learned at the same time and in relation to the same group of facts, *because* in fact he *is* learned and cannot *be* not learned at the same time and in relation to the same group of facts. The P.C. may be a postulate, as Schiller has put it; but it is a postulate demanded by reality. Else it would be gratuitous and would not concern reality, would not help mind in its proper task, the reflection of reality.¹

Now, each general law and principle is always concerned only

¹ It is, of course, impossible to discuss here in full the very controversial relations between thinking and being. The assumption that being is at the basis of thinking, although I personally am inclined to deem it correct, need be accepted by the reader only as a convenient working hypothesis.

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with *one* feature or property common to a class of things. So also the P.C. is not immediately concerned with all the manifold aspects and qualities of things, i.e. their colour, shape, etc. Being the most general of all laws, covering everything, it must be concerned with a property which is common to everything, which is a common factor in all reality. But this is the property of being as being. We may apply to the P.C. the method of Baconian induction and ask for the reason of its validity. Then the reason for the P.C. must be wherever the P.C. is, must be nowhere where it is not, and must be present always in the degree in which the P.C. is fulfilled. Only being as being accomplishes these three conditions.

Being as being is the primary object of the P.C. So the ultimate statement of the P.C. would be: "Being is not and cannot be non-being"; or "contradictory being, i.e. being which is also non-being, is nothing." All the other formulations which can be given of the P.C., and which I need not enumerate and discuss here in detail, are secondary to, are special cases of this one, for all other "objects" obey the P.C. only because and in so far as they participate in this one identical property, in being. Thus the P.C. can be stated of *real things* and their *attributes*, and it is with this aspect of the P.C. that we are especially concerned in this article. But when we say, e.g.: "a 'thing' cannot at the same time be and not be," or "contradictory attributes exclude each other and cannot coincide in one and the same identical part of a 'thing,'" we apply the categories of being to "things." The same is true for the different ways in which we may state the P.C. for our *judgments* and *thoughts*. They all are valid, because logical thinking participates in and reflects "being." In the case of *human consciousness* it can be shown *in detail* that it observes the P.C. only as far as it assumes the categories of being.¹

To assume the P.C. to be a principle of general validity means to say that being is the *dominating idea* of all thinking. This statement, which is the starting-point of my further investigations, was first suggested to me by the admirable analysis Rosmini has given of the P.C. It means that being is present as an indispensable element in the interior of all objects of thought and is reflected in all logical judgment. Only the presence of and the implicit relation to the idea of being makes judgment and thinking possible. The data of sensation are transformed into thoughts only when touched by the idea of being. But what is "being"? We can give the definition of "being" only by pointing to its law (the P.C.) and to its *categories*. It may happen that another name is given to this complex of properties, which we called "being," e.g. the name of "spirit." It is essential for the P.C. only that the *categories* of being are an element of the dominating idea, be this called "being" or "spirit."

¹ See E. Conze, *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, 1932, 4-77.

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III. THE CONCEPT OF BEING AND THE CONDITIONS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE P.C.

(I) *General Survey*

The fundamental property of being, as expressed in the P.C., is not an isolated one. It is connected with other properties, as with its conditions. We now must ask: which properties must "being" communicate to a thing that it may be subject to the P.C.? Which are the chief properties of being, i.e. the chief ontological conditions of the working of the P.C.?

First, as a matter of course, the contradictory attributes, in order to be really contradictory, and to annihilate each other, must have one and the same subject. They must not only be "somehow united," but the two properties must concern the *same* identical object, seen at the *same* time and in relation to the *same* part.

Secondly, being and the things which participate in being are *determinate*, i.e. they are different, they are distinguished from everything that is not themselves. To be determinate, to be different, to be separated from all other objects, to be itself and nothing else, these all are one and the same. For it is just by its definite characteristics that a thing is marked off and distinguished from all others. This excludes all *ambiguity* from the reality of things. Each object, at a certain time and in a certain relation has only one attribute and not more than one in one relation. Reality in itself is supposed to be unequivocal.

The P.C. cannot be applied to indeterminate objects, in so far as and in the respect in which they are indeterminate. In particular propositions, affirmation and negation are compatible with each other: "Some A are B; some A are non-B." These two judgments are not contradictory: both can be true. There is an element of indeterminateness in them, and that is in the word "some" (which either means "at least some" or "only some"). By abolishing this indeterminate element in "some," by saying: "All these some A are B" and "all these same some A are non-B," we obtain a real contradiction. The case is similar with the indefinite judgments. The P.C. is the law of things and judgments only in so far as they are determinate.

It is a condition of the P.C. that diversity cannot at the same time be unity, non-diversity. In our world everything suffers from a dearth of properties, it has not at its disposal an infinite wealth of attributes, it is excluded from a great amount of properties and qualities; in this world things are repelled from each other, they collide and they cannot penetrate each other indefinitely. This *finiteness* of things and their *hard exclusiveness* against each other is a condition of the P.C.

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Now the P.C. can be inadequate to express the fundamental law of reality either in the sense that it is *meaningless* in regard to this reality or in the sense that it is *violated* by this reality. The principle of contradiction becomes meaningless in regard to a reality if this does not show or contain the categories implied in contradiction, if there is no object to which the P.C. can be applied. The P.C. is violated by a reality, if contradictions do actually appear in it, if contradictory attributes actually coincide in one and the same thing.

A further distinction must be drawn: We may distinguish two aspects of reality, one initial, unsatisfactory, only "apparent" and untrue, the other final and true. Then the P.C. can be abolished for either one or the other. Kant, Herbart, Bostroem and Bradley abolish the P.C. in some sense or other for the initial world only. Heracleitism, Nicholas of Cusa, Hegel, etc., abolish it for the final and true world. It is only with the latter view that we are concerned here.

We first investigate the question, under which conditions the P.C. becomes *meaningless* for ultimate reality. We saw that the P.C. presupposes the existence of *identity* and of determinate and sharply defined *distinctions* in reality. Where one of these two is denied to be a character of ultimate reality, the P.C. does not express and render a characteristic of ultimate and real reality.

Now these two aspects of reality seem to be strongly guaranteed by the necessities of practical life. But the attitude of philosophers towards everyday practical life is very often a critical one: they do not accept the data of everyday experience as ultimate data: they try to go behind and beyond them. Most philosophy is concerned with a world which appears to the philosopher to be qualitatively different from and more real than the world of the average man in the street. The denial of the practical world may in some cases go so far as to imply even the P.C.-character of this world. It is with these cases that we are now concerned. We shall now consider first the case that the category of *identity* disappears from the real world, and secondly the case that the category of *distinction* disappears.

(2) *The P.C. is Meaningless in Reality*

(a) *Because there is no identity in the real world.* The insistence on the fact of change in the universe which goes so far as to exclude all elements of rest, stability, permanence, identity and being, from the image of the real world has been propounded in different times from different motives. We find it in the school of Heracleitus, in the doctrines of *Protagoras* and *Cratylos*. The humanistic system of Protagoras tends to exclude all definite and determinate properties

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from the reality of things in order to transfer them into man, into his sensations and aspirations. Recently *Bergson* developed a similar theory. It is common feature of both theories that stability, rest, etc., are considered as illusions created by the considerations and needs of an everyday practical life, which appears equally inferior to the aristocratic and esoteric haughtiness of an Heracleitus, as to the prophet of the rich, spiritual, irrational, and vigorously antimechanic *élan vital*.

In the case of Heracleitism, Plato and Aristotle have conclusively shown the destructive effect on the P.C. of any doctrine which interpretes movement as a mere becoming, as the absolute negative of rest, and as the only real feature and aspect of things:¹ Movement, conceived by Heracleitism as excluding all elements of being, is devoid of all identity and sameness. There is movement and becoming, but there *is* nothing which moves or is moved, or which becomes. There is a perpetual, uninterrupted, and complete flux, and nothing lasts or remains in it. Without interruption one change follows the other. There is no halting-point at which the P.C. might be applied. Nothing substantial outlasts the perpetual change of events. There is no identical nature, which unites several "states" or "aspects" of one "thing." Everything is in a perpetual flux, without a constant relation to one another, unconnected, incoherent like flame or fire, without cause, permanent order, or immobile law, without definite distinctions. It is just because for Heracleitism no lawful connection exists between events that it is distinguished from the modern dynamic theory of matter and from the Buddhist doctrine of universal impermanence and change; for these doctrines assume the persistence of a physical or moral law above the perpetual change. "Things" are for Heracleitism neither determinate nor determinable, because they do not even for a fraction of a moment persist in a definite identity, because everything loses its properties or qualities in the very moment in which it got them. Everything *is* and also *is not*. There is only a becoming which neither is nor is not. In fact, as Plato says, "there *is* neither anyone to know, nor anything to be known" in this world.

(b) *Because there are no distinctions in the real world.* The school of thought, which we may—somewhat inadequately—call the school of "*mystical pantheism*," tends to make the P.C. meaningless by abolishing the differences and distinctions in the real world.

The culminating point of all mystical experience is the state of *ecstasy*, of complete union with God, with the One. In mystical

¹ The following description of the relation of the Heracleitean world to the P.C. and its conditions is taken from Plato's *Theaitetos* and *Cratylus*, and from different passages of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Asclepius. For the exact references, see E. Conze, *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, 1932, n. 29.

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ecstasy one and only one idea, one and only one object fills the whole mind, binds all attention and *is* the whole of reality. *Mysticism* develops into *mystical pantheism* under the two conditions, namely, that the state of ecstasy is considered to give a true, the *only* true image of reality, and further that the one object of ecstasy is expressly stated to *include all* reality. If distinctions and oppositions are, although different in ordinary practical life, but one in the object of ecstasy, if a contact with true reality is attained only in ecstasy, and if the object of ecstasy comprehends all reality, then the unreality and vanity of the distinctions and opposites in the object of ecstasy renders also the P.C. meaningless. Mysticism shows a strong tendency towards mystical pantheism especially in the Indian Upanishads, in Chinese Taoism, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in Mahometan Sufism, in German Metaphysics (Master Eckehart, Nicholas of Cusa, Jakob Boehme, Hamann, Hegel), and occasionally in England (e.g. Brook).

Generally mystical pantheists do not devote much attention to the consequences of their ideas on logical thinking, its categories and laws. As far as I know, the German cardinal *Nicholas of Cusa* has, at least in his *De docta ignorantia* and his other writings between 1440 and 1450, clearest of all elaborated this aspect of mystical pantheism. In his philosophy the infinite totality, the absolute infinite, the maximum *quo majus esse non potest* is the "dominating idea." There is only one true reality, the one infinite totality which has the fundamental property to comprehend everything. This conception affects the P.C. in a double sense:

On the one hand, the mystical pantheist can assume that in fact nothing except the One and infinite Absolute does exist. All differences are then absolutely reduced to nought. Since contradictions are not possible without differences, the P.C. is meaningless and inapplicable.

On the other hand, a more dynamic and somewhat complicated theory can be given, and was in fact given, by Nicholas of Cusa: Reality appears as a complete and undivided unity in the experience of *mystical ecstasy*. It is the attitude of *everyday practical life* which acknowledges the differences and divisions in reality. Now, man does not begin his conscious life with mystical experience, but, before he reaches it, he first has to go through the experience of everyday life. In the theory of Cusanus the everyday aspect of reality has not entirely vanished away even on the highest summit of truth; it is preserved, but seen and interpreted against the background of the reality of mystical experience. Cusanus does mention the differences, distinctions, and divisions. He first predicates them of the Absolute, and only after that he shows their unreality and vanity. Therefore in his philosophy the P.C. is *actually violated*.

It is violated first with respect to the one and absolute reality

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itself. For in the everyday world the incompatible attributes are distributed among different and mutually exclusive things and aspects. Now this difference between things has gone, they are all united in one reality and the contradictory attributes are all united in the one infinite reality. The totality is the one and identical subject of all contradictory, incompatible, and mutually exclusive attributes. As Cusanus has put it: "Since nothing is opposed to the Greatest, also the Smallest coincides with it." Cusanus explains that in this one totality distinctiveness is the same as indistinctiveness, plurality is the same as unity, identity is the same as diversity, particularity coincides with universality, posteriority and priority do not exclude each other, etc. The trend of the whole argument demands and the texts show clearly¹ that Cusanus, like the other mystical pantheists, does not maintain a mere *unity* of *opposites*, but an *identity* of *differences*, which is a *contradiction* in itself and of which the *identity* of *opposites* is a special case.

The logical mind will try to evade this conception by assuming that of mutually exclusive properties one is predicated in this, the other in another relation, that they are all attributes of the same thing, but of different and particular aspects of it. But this interpretation is excluded by the consideration that also the parts and the whole must coincide, must be the same in the totality. It is *one* totality; it has no proper parts; it is present as a *whole* and *undivided* in whatever we may consider as one of its "parts." Each predicate is without any restriction or limitation affirmed of the totality, and so is the attribute, which is different from and incompatible with it. For in the absolute totality there is one relation only for everything, the relation to the totality itself—since there is nothing outside it—and the relation to the totality wholly and undivided—since it has no parts.

There is a further aspect of the Absolute which excludes the P.C. Cusanus says: "Since the absolutely Greatest is really everything, which can be, and is so far removed from all opposition that the Smallest coincides with it, it is above affirmation and negation." But since the P.C. speaks of the relation between affirmative and negative judgments, it cannot be employed here.

The P.C. is also violated with respect to the world of the different things. For the unity and identity of things in the maximum devours and *annihilates* the differences they had in the ordinary world, but

¹ See E. Conze, *Der Satz vom Widerspruch*, 1932, 368–370. Robert Grenville (Lord Brook), *The Nature of Truth*, 1640, p. 100: "I fully conclude with Aristotle's Adversaries, Anaxagoras, Democritus, etc. That Contradictories may be simul and semel in the same Subject, same Instant, same Notion (not only in two distinct respects or notions, as one thing may be causa and effectum, Pater and Filius, respectu diversi; but even in the same respect, under one and the same Notion)."

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at the same time the differences are *maintained* and preserved in the maximum. So the differences *are* and they *are not*, first successively, but also in some sense simultaneously, since even on the stage of absolute truth a semblance of difference still clings and adheres to the identity of things in the Absolute.

(3) *The P.C. is Violated by the Dialectic Nature of Reality*

Thus there is an element of dialectics in the theory of Nicholas of Cusa, which later on was developed by *Hegel*. Various considerations and motives have formed Hegel's rejection of the P.C. We may distinguish *three* main currents which contributed to it: First it is often forgotten that Hegel was not only a great logician, but also a great mystic. It is from *mystical pantheism* that he takes the fundamental assumption of his Logic that all categories are attributes of the one Absolute, are "definitions of God." We have just discussed the consequences of this assumption for the P.C. But Hegel combined this idea of one all-comprehending totality with a certain form of *Heracleitism*. The Hegelian Absolute is in constant movement, and so is everything which forms a "part" or an "aspect" of it. But the movement of the Absolute is not the perpetual and lawless flux of Heracleitus. It is a change governed by definite laws. Hegel's Absolute develops through a long history. One of the fundamental laws of this historical movement is the law of *dialectics*. With this third element in Hegelianism, with the dialectic element, we shall deal in the following section.

Dialectics, as conceived by Hegel and his school, maintains a connection between movement and change on the one side, and contradiction on the other. At least two explanations of movement are possible: The one explains each movement and each change by the influence of some external cause which *pushes* a thing out of the state in which it is, out of a state in which it would rest and remain, unless an external cause acted upon it. But Hegel, without denying the effects of the exterior cause, attributes change and movement also to an interior cause. He sees all things against the background, and in some sense as parts of the perfect Absolute, and believes that a changing thing shows by the mere fact of its change and alteration that it was an unsatisfactory, incomplete, unfinished, imperfect reality. *In itself* the thing has a tendency to destroy *itself*, to move *itself*, to change *itself*, as a sign of its inherent imperfection. Everything thus contains its own negative, and is driven out of its state by this inherent contradiction. Contradiction is the impulse of movement, it is the actual power which drives it on. Contradiction is real; but it is impossible for reality to be content in contradiction and to remain in it. According to formal logic the contradiction is

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dissolved into zero, into the abstract nought. The "result" of a contradictory being is the not-being of this being. Also in Hegelian dialectics a thing cannot acquiesce in contradiction; but the contradictory thing or process is dissolved into the negation, not of everything, but of just this particular thing or process. The contradiction is solved by the thing moving out of its present state into another one. Movement and change are the solution of the contradiction.

It is not possible to discuss here the many problems connected with this conception. I will only illustrate it by one famous example, by the dialectic interpretation of *local movement*: Local movement can be accomplished only because a body is at the very same moment in one place and also in another place, because it is in one and the same place and also is not there. Local movement is the continual positing and the simultaneous solution of this contradiction. The body moves *because* it had come into a contradictory situation and wants to come out of it, out of a situation which makes incompatible demands upon it. *Because* the body cannot *be* at the same time at A and B, it *moves* from A to B.

This theory is of course open to many objections. But we are in the present essay not concerned with defending or refuting the theories which reject the objective validity of the P.C. Our only task is to expose them as clearly as possible and then show their emotional and practical basis, to which they owe their existence.

IV. THE PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL BASIS OF THE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ABOUT THE P.C.

We now make the attempt to show that it was through entertaining certain types of practical and emotional attitude towards the world that the objective value of the P.C. was destroyed. At the basis of Heracleitism is a sad and melancholy feeling that all things instantaneously give way to fate and dissolution and nothing remains. Heracleitus himself was not as consistent in his theory of flux as some of his disciples; besides the irrational flux he acknowledged the assistance of a certain law, of a certain Logos, in the world. But the case of *Buddhism* shows that, whereas pessimism only *tends* to destroy the P.C., radical pessimism, i.e. *radical* negation of the practice of self-preservation, destroys it *in fact*: The doctrine of the "impermanence" of things, as expressed in the religious formula "all things are evanescent," is at the very root of Buddhism. Buddhist philosophers elaborated this idea. For *Vasubandhu*, e.g. things perish in the very same moment in which they come to existence, and it is important to note that they perish without any cause, but simply in consequence of their own constitution; in them, as we would say,

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affirmation and negation, being and non-being, coincide simultaneously and thus they perish instantaneously. This doctrine is clearly the theoretical counterpart of the annihilation of the world through the eightfold path. The *Madhyamika*-theory of the universal "emptiness" of things expresses the same intention: The Madhyamikas look at the universe from the standpoint of "absolute truth," i.e. from the standpoint of the Nirvana. Then things are "void" of all properties; all properties and categories can be affirmed and equally well denied of things, being inapplicable to a reality, which is without any plurality, properties, and differences. Things neither are, nor are not; nor have they being and non-being at once; nor have they not non-being and being at once. The wise clings not even in thought to any attribute, for this clinging will involve a desire and thus lead him astray. The same can be shown from the German pessimistic philosopher, Julius Bahnsen, a follower of Schopenhauer. He describes a world, as it appears and corresponds to a person who does not want to preserve, but who wants to annihilate himself. The person he has in view is so disgusted with life that he annihilates all he does. He simultaneously affirms and denies his self-preservation, he is interested at the same time in his own destruction and in his own preservation. This contradictory attitude of the tragical and radically pessimistic man is then projected into the outward reality according to the idea of Schopenhauer that the real essence of the world, the noumenal world, can be found only in the interior of man himself. So the volition of the utterly pessimistic man, turned as it is against itself, becomes the dominating idea of Bahnsen's philosophy. He says: "The metaphysical Ens is a Volition which has the only desire not to be a Volition." This volition is a never-ending contradiction in itself. It is rent and divided into two contradictory tendencies, and it is also the unity of these contradictory tendencies. It is an *ens volens idemque nolens*. All the contradictory acts of this tragic Volition are simultaneous, since, according to Schopenhauer's theory, there is no time in the noumenal world, and so everything is in the same absolute simultaneousness, succession appearing only in the phenomenal world. So radical pessimism destroys the objective validity of the P.C.

We likewise saw that the P.C. is destroyed, if man, as *Protagoras* did, gets the proud conviction that his sensory and sensuous activities are the measure of all things, of the things being that they are, and of the things not being that they are not. We further suggested the emotional background of *Bergson's* irrationalism. We still have to describe the practical and emotional attitude which is at the basis of *mystical pantheism*. We described the *object* of the mystical pantheist and its law. We must now say some words about the *subject* to whom the world presents itself in this manner and whose

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attitude produces the particular features of this world: Man has abolished all action, has become indifferent to the differences between things, after having felt that all earthly things are equally valueless as compared with the absolute Value, God. Man has destroyed, has annihilated the Ego and *all* his aspirations. As Chuang Tsu has said about the true aim and attitude of man: "To embrace all things equally, without preference, without favour, that is infinity: all things consider equally, what then is short, what then is long?" Where not one thing is preferred to another, where not one thing is valued higher than another, where all action and impulse have died away, there also the difference between the one and the other dies away; everything becomes one and undifferentiated for him who found rest. As Angelus Silesius has put it:

No man can ever know perfect felicity
Till Otherness be swallowed up in Unity.

If we further ask for the emotional and practical background of *dialectics*, we must not overlook the Christian element in *Hegel's* theory. He measures all things by the standard of the absolute, perfect, and infinite God. Some Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, like Anselm of Canterbury, Petrus Damiani, and also Nicholas of Cusa were led by the same comparison of all things with God to the conclusion that the things of this world properly are more "not existing," than that they "are existing." All things were polluted by sin, and sin had made them vain and fragile. In the Hegelian theory not sin, but contradiction is the sign of the imperfection and finiteness of things, and by the contradiction in things each thing is more "not existing" than it "exists," or, more exactly, it exists and equally does not exist. Owing to the contradiction it contains, no thing has a full and complete reality, no thing can rest content in the state in which it is, all things "must go to their judgment."¹

Now, I think, we can draw the following conclusions as a result of our investigations: A phenomenal world, a world as it appears to us, consists of two factors: On the one hand, the "noumenal" world; on the other, a strong subjective factor. The image of our phenomenal world is largely influenced and formed by our emotions, aspirations, and interests. These in their turn are not the outcome of pure reasoning, but the result of our character and of the actual situation we occupy in the world of nature and society. We can speak of the objective validity of a law only in relation to one of the many phenomenal worlds, which, as long as we do not know the noumenal world, must

¹ I can deal here only with this one aspect of Hegelian dialectics. In a separate article I hope to discuss all the fundamental assumptions as to the ultimate nature of reality and as to the nature and task of man, which are implied in Hegelian dialectics.

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all be regarded as being of the same theoretical value. Now, we have shown that the question whether we consider the P.C. to be a law of objective validity or not depends on the question whether we decide for optimism or for pessimism, for quietism or for activism, whether we feel as sensuous or as rational beings, whether we decide for or against a mechanical control of the environment, whether we are inclined to experience ourselves as perfect or as imperfect, as complete or as incomplete beings, as creatures of a God or as masters of the world. But decision in all that does not depend primarily on rational and theoretical considerations, but on our practical outlook. It is also this practical outlook which ultimately decides whether we regard "Being"—as it was described above—as the dominating idea or whether we choose another dominating idea, as, for example, the Heracleitean flux, the mystic Absolute, etc. Certain types of practical attitude have been proved to destroy the P.C. in the world which corresponds to them. Practical decisions penetrate and influence the validity even of the most abstract law of thought. The P.C. is in fact not an absolute law, but relative to the practical attitude you choose to assume.