historical subjects and to oppose them. We can also turn this around and say that Hegel's entire theory is based on a distinction between natural elements and historical elements, but that, in the final analysis, it fits in with the concept of natural history that he himself promulgated. And that brings me to a discussion of the concept of natural history, with which I should like to begin in the second half of the semester, and which will then lead us on to the problem of freedom.

Adorno's notes for this lecture:

[Later addition:] continue here after the vacation. 5.1.65

Fundamental statement about the relations between nature and history. Hitherto, history as natural history (p. 64) – Proof: the primacy of statistics in Durkheim. Hegel himself speaks of natural history. But in his case, nature is essentially a basis, history is spirit. Spirit itself is naturalistic: therefore, belief in nature where history is thematic.²

(p. 64)³ Marx quotation. The concept of natural history in Marx taken over from Hegel and reinterpreted.

(p. 65)⁴ The idea of the laws of nature also as a mystification.

The idea of natural growth [Nachwuchs] both real and a socially necessary illusion.

Laws of nature not to be taken literally, not to be ontologized. In other words, the laws of nature capable of being abrogated. They are the blind continuation of eating and being eaten as the principle on which reason is modelled and which it no longer needs once it has achieved self-consciousness. That is the pivotal transformation [Umschlag]. No other reason, only the reason that knows itself. Explain the Critique of Pure Reason.

Kant's distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity to be applied to history.
Already [to be found] in Kant where the realm of freedom is taken much more seriously, i.e., more freely than in Hegel. Freedom as something that creates itself.

In contrast to the naturalistic approach of vulgar Marxism, natural history is a critical concept.

History has as yet no global subject. The identification of the proletariat with the latter is, however, [text breaks off]

Ironically, Marx was a Social Darwinist. What the Social Darwinist praises is what he regards as negativity.

p. 66\footnote{at the bottom; quotation from the Grundrisse.}

Natural history means as much as the mythical character of history. See the Hegel quote\footnote{above.}

The cyclical as an archaic image of natural history.

p. 69 below, ‘Looking into the abyss, Hegel perceived . . .’\footnote{then quotation - 70 above.}

Read down to p. 75.\footnote{9}

[Later addition that should probably continue here:] On 5.1. 1965 down to the top of p. 70. Introduce the idea that the history of nature = second nature.

[Hilmar Tillack’s notes:] On the relations between nature and history. Not concerned with the problem of the historical sciences versus the natural sciences or history as opposed to external nature. The question of natural history is more specifically that of the inner composition of elements of nature and elements of history within history itself. The theme of ‘nature and history’ seems to point to a contrast between two antithetical concepts. We shall see with what right and by how much. At issue, then, is the question of freedom or unfreedom in history.

Hegel possesses the concept of natural history, but astonishingly he fails to redeem the promise implicit in the term ‘nature’. Nature makes an appearance only as the natural basis of history, that is to say, in the shape of the geographical conditions in which historical events are enacted, or else in the elements of physical anthropology which, ominously enough, come under the heading of ‘race’. In their execution, the dialectics of history and nature in Hegel fall short of their own ambitions; he does not advance beyond the creation of more or less separate spheres that are supposed to be transformed into one another. The internal mediation between these categories is neglected in favour of treating entire spheres en bloc. This introduces a pattern, a mechanism, that is hardly compatible with dialectics. Adorno is concerned with internal mediation, not with the foundation of history in nature. In other words, he wishes to define even the sphere of spirit in Hegel as nature, since spirit is regarded as the quintessence of an unconscious domination of nature. At the very point where history unfolds in its most uninhibited manner, it takes on the qualities of blind nature instead of distancing itself from them, as Hegel’s theory would reasonably lead us to expect.

The fact that until now history has been natural history and that, while seeming to be distanced from nature, it becomes ensnared in it, is evident from a glance at Durkheim’s sociology. Durkheim is instructive because he combines a very specific construction of history and society with a highly emphatic claim about its naturalness. Durkheim’s method was statistical. We may remind ourselves of Kierkegaard’s mockery of suicide statistics that are in conflict with the autonomous individual of his theory. However, the theory of both men is absorbed by nominalism. The law of the greatest number is to be understood nominalistically: an average is extrapolated from the universe of observed cases. The law makes no claim to have any conceptual autonomy vis-à-vis the phenomena it represents. The law of the greatest number functions by defining objectivity as natural history in contrast to the independent individuals who rise above it subjectively.

Marx makes a point of confronting Hegel on this issue, even though he agrees with him in claiming that objectivity asserts itself over heads of individuals and through their actions: ‘And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement . . .’ or ‘My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them’ (Capital, vol. 1, Preface to the first German edition, p. 10). The idea of natural laws governing history, the idea that social entanglements are the natural outgrowth of history, goes together with the unfreedom of the individual. There is this to be said about the interpretation of Marx: in contrast to the prevailing belief that Marx had a positive view of the natural laws of society and that one needs only to obey them to obtain the possibility of the right kind of society – in contrast to this belief, Marx wishes to get beyond them into the kingdom of freedom, i.e., to escape from the notion of history as natural history. As Alfred Schmidt has shown, Marx is not concerned with Feuerbach’s anthropological concept of nature.\footnote{On the contrary, he reinstated Hegel’s dialectical idea of nature in explicit rebuttal of the young Hegelians. There is a contradiction here: on the one hand, Marx speaks with the scientist’s passion of the inexorable laws of nature, in particular of the evolution of the laws of economics. At the same time, however, these laws are}
shown to be a mystification, an illusion. It is this twin-tracked attitude that provides the key to understanding Marxism as a critical theory, and not the thesis of the natural laws governing society that we need to understand if we are to gain a hold on them. It is that thesis that is the cause of the reification, the perversion and sclerosis that we discover when people appeal to Marx today. When we see in a passage late on in Capital, "The law of capitalist accumulation, metamorphosed by economists into a pretended law of Nature . . ." the contradiction is what constitutes the dialectical medium. Accumulation does not refer to a man hoarding money, but to the situation in which the profit of an economic cycle is turned into capital once again, is reinvested in the new cycle. The organic nature of capitalist society is both an actuality and at the same time a socially necessary illusion. The illusion signifies that within this society laws can only be implemented as natural processes over people's heads, while their validity arises from the form of the relations of production within which production takes place.

This should not be regarded ontologically as a doctrine of so-called human beings. In the kingdom of freedom these laws would cease to be valid. Kant's kingdom of freedom is confronted by the kingdom of necessity which [Soviet] dialectical materialism prolongs and dubs the kingdom of freedom. Just as individuals have not existed hitherto, so too there has been no global subject; the two are corollaries of one another. Hegel avoids the problem with the ruse, the cunning of reason: a global subject devoid of subjectivity. It is cunning because it is detached from all personality; it confronts human beings like an abstract calculus. In this way, the unconscious history of nature is continued. Through an irony, Marx in contrast was a Social Darwinist. He has a critical view of natural history. The Grundrisse contains a passage: "As much, then, as the whole of this movement appears as a social process . . . so much does the totality of the process appear as an objective interrelation, which arises spontaneously from nature . . ." The 'natural laws of society' are ideology inasmuch as they are claimed to be immutable. They are actuality inasmuch as they are hunted down in Capital as the phenomenology of non-mind. In the chapter on fetishism, Marx speaks of the 'theological niceties' of the commodity form. He thus mocks the false consciousness that acts as a mirror to the parties involved in the process of barter, reflecting back to them as characteristics of things what in reality is a social relation. Here, ideology tells the truth about society as it is, denouncing it as heteronomous. But by elevating the truth about the false society to the status of positive knowledge, i.e., by abstracting from that denunciation, it turns into ideology. If you take dialectics with the seriousness due to it, ideology ceases just to perch on the substructure [of society]. The element of ideology is implicit in the exchange relation itself; abstracting from the specific circumstances between people and the commodities—an abstraction that is necessary in the process of exchange—gives rise to false consciousness. The essence of false consciousness is that it reflects mere postulates as qualities of the things themselves. Without this crucial factor the monstrous mechanism of exchange could not survive. We are speaking here of a violence that is perennially intrinsic to ideology, because ideology is not an extraneous false consciousness but is something that sustains the entire mechanism.

The idea that theory becomes a real force when it grips the masses proves to be valid not simply for the theory of the commodity, but all previously existing structures. Hegel had a flash of insight into this: 'But it is at any rate utterly essential that the constitution should not be regarded as something made, even if it does have an origin in time. On the contrary, it is quite simply that which has been in and for itself, and should therefore be regarded as divine and enduring, and as exalted above the sphere of all manufactured things' (Philosophy of Right, §273, p. 312). But his insight was blind [bewußlos], since he idolized as something existing in nature something that had been manufactured. Hegel fails to expose it as an illusion. What Marx adds as a philosopher is the consciousness of this illusion. Hegel presents as physis [existing in nature] something that is thesei [has been posited]; he defines the constitution of the historical world as something belonging to the world of nature. State constitutions should not arise from the conscious act of individuals. Hegel's logic sets out to provide a radical dialectics, but without going so far as to overthrow the ideal of a prima philosophia. Hegel sympathizes with the idea of an immutable aspect of history whose totality is intact. Spirit and reconciliation transfigure the myth: 'Whatever is by nature contingent is subject to contingencies, and this fate is therefore itself a necessity.' Occidental nature myths already rehearsed what Hegel predicted of history. The cycle is an archaic image. Hegel's philosophy of history still appeals to an automatism over which history has no power. The world-historical political drama is perceived as a second nature, but the first nature recurs in it. Criticism of Hegel is directed at the fact that he perceived history as second nature, but that he would like to confirm its status as a zone of the spirit and that he naively identifies as a positive feature of history the very aspect that is incompatible with the freedom that he also intends.

[End of Tillack's notes]
Ladies and gentlemen, you will recollect that last time we discussed the concept of natural history and had arrived at the notion of a second nature and its ambiguous meaning. I should like now simply to continue with my reflections on the ideas we have now established in connection with the Hegelian concept of a second nature. This, you will remember, was the spiritual that forms the substance and the definition of freedom; it is embodied in the legal system on which Hegel then confers the title of 'second nature'. To the best of my knowledge, this concept was taken up again for the first time — and in a very emphatic way — in Georg Lukács's Theory of the Novel. Taken as a set of reflections on art, as aesthetic meditations, this is a highly problematic book, but it retains its fundamental importance as one of the first attempts at an objectivist philosophy of history, instead of a merely subjectivist one. I should like to encourage all of you to read it now that it has been reprinted, even though the preface contains an attack on me. However, I do not wish to address his criticisms because what Lukács says there has nothing in common with the quality of my own work. The concept of a second nature remains the negation of whatever might be thought of as a first nature. So it does not represent the recurrence of a nature that has been suppressed and is now being restored, but on the contrary it is the totality of whatever has been so completely trapped by social and rational mechanisms — the two cannot be distinguished — that nothing differing from it can manifest itself. And because there is nothing else outside it, it acquires the appearance of the natural, in other words, of what simply exists and is given. There is not even the possibility of something outside it becoming visible, something that is not caught up in the general inclusiveness. The exclusion of possibility which converts this second nature into the only reality is what also turns it into the substitute for possibility, and it is in this way that the semblance of the natural comes into being. Thus whatever is a thesei (if I may use this terminology), that is, whatever is posited, albeit not produced by individuals, as Hegel and Marx taught, but brought about, as both recognized, by its impersonal context, usurps the insignia of everything that appears to the bourgeois consciousness to be nature and natural. You can picture this to yourselves quite easily by reflecting on the fact that in the unthinking language of everyday (a language I had always rather disliked) a man is thought to speak naturally if he speaks like everyone else, that is to say, if he is a man who conforms to general linguistic conventions. In contrast, a man who does not speak like that, who insists on the individual aspects of his own personality, can easily gain a reputation for affectation and artificiality. I think that what people irresponsibly mean by a 'natural person' is a prime example of this concept of second nature, and you can all see what is meant by it without my having to pursue this discussion any further. The more relentlessly the process of societalization spins its web around every aspect of immediate human and interpersonal relations, the more impossible it becomes to recollect the historical origins of that process and the more irresistible the external semblance of something natural. Nothing that is outside appears to me to be outside — there is even a sense in which it has ceased to be what is outside — thanks to the total mediation that transforms even the elements of nature into elements of this second nature. And so — to return to my argument — if you think of the role played by nature today, in the ordinary sense of nature in a landscape as contrasted with our urban, industrial civilization, you will realize that this nature is already something planned, cultivated and organized. It is gradually turning into a nature reserve (if I may exaggerate somewhat) and — as the director of the Frankfurt Zoo has frequently pointed out — it is already becoming a problem literally to protect the natural space that wild animals need if they are to be able to move around freely. In this sense, then — and I intend this only by way of explanation: I am sure that you are all aware that, when I talk about a second nature, I am not referring literally to the nature of a nature reserve — in this sense, we can see that what seems to be outside us is in reality not outside at all, but something that has been captured. This semblance of the nature is a function of the gap.
between the history of mankind and primary nature. And by primary nature — I say this so that you should not pick me up on this and say, you see, even Adorno has forgotten about the dialectic here — by primary nature I mean in the first instance no more than the elements, the objective elements that the experiencing consciousness encounters without his experiencing them as things he has himself mediated. Semblance is the prophetic warning of an increasingly powerful spell.

On this point I should like to read you a passage from Marx, from his early writings, in fact from The German Ideology: 'We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist.' So here you have this insight into the reciprocal mediation of these two so-called spheres — but in contrast to Hegel, about whom I spoke in this connection last time, this mediation does not take place externally in the sense that history becomes a special realm built up on nature. But rather, as Marx suggests, the history of nature and the history of men mutually condition each other as long as men exist. But if you will allow me to extract a further conclusion from this — and teasing out the implications of this reciprocal mediation of nature and history constitutes the substance of the philosophy of the young Marx — I should like to add that of course there can no longer be any point in talking about an insulated sphere of nature or history. Marx is in no doubt that, if we are to speak of priorities here, then precedence is to be given to society, to the historical sphere. But there too we should not let ourselves be tempted to ontologize. We should not argue, as has been imputed to me, wrongly I believe, that this means that in the beginning there was society which then created heaven and earth. For society itself is determined by the things of which it is composed and it therefore necessarily contains a non-social dimension. Critical, dialectical thought should repudiate the idea that these two concepts, history and philosophy, are isolated, entirely detachable strata. The traditional antithesis of nature and history is both true and false. It is true when it expresses what happens to nature; it is false when it simply reinforces conceptually history's own concealment of its own natural growth.

The distinction between nature and history is an unthinking expression of the division of labour that has directly projected the inevitable differences between scientific methods onto the objects of their study. The ahistorical concept of history that is cultivated in the resurrected metaphysics of Martin Heidegger, above all in what it has called historicity, would serve to demonstrate the complicity of ontological thought with naturalistic thought from which the former had so eagerly sought to distance itself. If history becomes the basic ontological structure of existence, or indeed a kind of qualitas occulta, a hidden quality of existence that is supposed to be essentially historical simply because of its temporal horizon, then history will be mutation as immutability and thus the imitation of a natural religion from which there is no escape. For there too there is eternal change (just think of the seasons) which constantly repeats itself and thus congeals into a constant factor. Thus to locate the concept of history in existence amounts paradoxically to an ontological inflation that does away with the concept of history by a sort of conjuring trick. Something similar happened in ancient times in the case of Hegel's favourite Heraclitus. While traditional historians of philosophy have always regarded the Eleatic philosophers, that is to say, the philosophers of being, as the polar opposites of Heraclitus, the philosopher of absolute becoming, modern classical philology has not been mistaken in its insistence that this distinction is not absolute and that the two extremes meet and merge. This ontologization of history makes it possible to transpose determinate historical processes at will into constant factors. The effect of this is to give a philosophical cachet to the vulgar notion that 'historical conditions, which once upon a time were thought to be the expression of God's will, are now to be regarded as natural. This is one of the ways in which existing reality can be justified as essential. The ontologists' claim that we have now moved beyond the divergence of nature and history does not hold water. The historicity abstracted from actual historical processes passes unscarred the thorn that bears the true guilt for the antithesis of nature and history, which itself ought not to be ontologized. In this respect, too, the new ontology is a crypto-idealism. It relates the non-identical to identity, and, by postulating the concept of historicity as the agent of history, it does away with everything that resists the process of identification by an all-dominant consciousness. We might point out, however, that ontology is driven to ideology, to reconciliation in the mind, because no reconciliation was achieved in reality. Historical contingency and the concept are at odds with each other, all the more inexorably, the more they are intertwined. We might speak in this context of contingency, chance as the historical fate of the individual, a fate that is meaningless because the historical process itself has no global subject and therefore presents itself as contingent and meaningless in this highest sense in which meaning stands opposed to the contingent. What nature actually is, is not just obscured by the
totality of what is *thesei*, what is posited, but the question of nature as the absolute first, immediate thing, as opposed to its mediations, represents the object of its search in the hierarchical form of an analytical proposition whose premises control everything that follows from them — but they do so according to the pattern established by what has been postulated. Thus what exists from the outset becomes a function of what is posited; and, in particular, the semblance of something that exists in itself, that is natural, non-posited, an absolute first thing, turns out to be a function of the act of positing, thanks to which this non-posited thing is unmasked as its opposite, as something that has been made. Through a sleight of hand, whatever is *thesei* is converted by history, which gave it birth, into *physis*, into nature, and in fact into second nature. Once the distinction has been postulated, it can be made more fluid by reflection, but cannot be ignored. Without reflection, admittedly, the distinction would render harmless the quintessence of the contents of the historical process, demoting it to the status of mere ornament, and on the other hand it would enthrone as essence whatever has not yet come into existence. Accordingly, mind would see all nature, and whatever claims to be nature, installed as history, and all history as nature.

That then is the programme — if I may call it that — that philosophy would have to postulate for the relation of nature to history. If I may repeat myself here: because I believe that this programme is constitutive for all attempts to interpret the philosophy of history, or indeed philosophy in general, I think that the attempt should be made to behold all nature, and whatever regards itself as nature, as history. Hegel would call it something that has become, or has been mediated. Conversely, however, *everything historical* has to be regarded as nature because thanks to its own violent origins [*Gesetztheit*] it remains under the spell of blind nature, from which it struggles to dissociate itself. I may perhaps here cite a passage from a lecture that I gave here to the Kant Society. This was over thirty years ago, in 1932, but in its broad outlines it has retained its validity: the task of philosophy should be to comprehend historical existence in its extreme historical determinacy, at the point where it is at its most historical, as itself a natural form of existence . . . or to conceive of nature as historical existence precisely where it is at its most natural. End of quotation. The point at which nature and history meet is in the fact of transience. Walter Benjamin acknowledged the truth of this in a prominent place in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, and in general this book goes far beyond the sphere of purely aesthetic questions. In this sense it belongs in the same tradition as Lukács’s book on the theory of the novel, which I mentioned to you earlier on.

Through the medium of aesthetics questions concerning the philosophy of history and even metaphysics become legible. It would be worth dwelling on these matters, and perhaps I shall at some point find time to explore the fact that for a whole series of thinkers the experience of art has become a sort of key to other branches of philosophy. This is something I am very conscious of. We are not speaking here of a naïve attempt to aestheticize philosophy, as Helmut Kuhn once accused me of doing. What is at issue, rather, is a particular relation to the experience of structures that purport to be meaningful and that provide a model both of meaning that can be explored and of the crisis of meaning. In this context, for those of you who are interested in this aspect of things, I would refer you to passages that I inserted into *The Jargon of Authenticity* in the course of my attack on Martin Heidegger. These were passages warning against the devaluation of so-called cultural philosophy and about the relationship between philosophy and so-called cultural philosophy. At any rate, to come back to Benjamin, here is the sentence that seems to me to provide a key not just to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, but to this entire philosophy: the poets of the baroque age had a vision of nature as ‘eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of this generation recognize history.’ Not only their vision, however, for even today the history of nature still remains the canon for the interpretation of the philosophy of history. I quote Benjamin once more, a few pages earlier in the same book: ‘When, as is the case in the *Trauerspiel*, history becomes part of the setting, it does so as script. The word “history” stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience.’ Here too would be the place to consider such matters as the decoding of one of the primeval allegories, that of the death’s head, but perhaps I shall be able to say something to you about that at some point in the future. But I would also remind you of the most ancient instance of an allegorical and hermeneutic writing from the theological tradition of monotheism, namely the *mene, mene tekel upharsin*. Benjamin goes on to say that the allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel* is present in reality in the form of the ruin. You can see how, in such motifs as the ruin mentioned here or the death’s head or the writing on the wall, the transition to concreteness is adumbrated that I think of as something that philosophy must implement in all seriousness. It differs from the usual philosophizing about the concrete in that the concrete references here are apprehended allegorically in their specific meaning, instead of serving as examples or paradigms for more general concepts whose validity they are supposed to demonstrate. This is how the concrete appears in an older generation
of philosophers such as Simmel.¹⁷ I believe that this is the truly pivotal turn to a relevant philosophy, but one which has not yet been taken by philosophical theory or, better perhaps, by epistemological theory to the requisite degree. However, it is one which my own modest efforts are striving to promote. What you will discover in this programme—and this is connected with that special notion of concreteness—is the transmutation of metaphysics into history. It secularizes metaphysics into the ultimate category of secularity, that of decay. Philosophy interprets its code at the micro-level, in the shards that result from decay and that are the bearers of objective meanings. No recollection of transcendence is possible any longer unless it passes through transience in the spirit of the heretical speculation that makes the life of the absolute as dependent upon the finite, as the finite is dependent upon that of the absolute. Those of you who know their Hegel will be aware of his thesis that the absolute and infinite are mutually incompatible tendencies. One such motif is the pervasive insight into the increasingly problematic nature of philosophical systems, a motif that is not the monopoly of any one school. By this I mean the impossibility of deducing all phenomena from a single, unified principle, or interpreting them all on that basis. If the light of philosophy can no longer be kindled by a single thought or motif or unified method—and we may ask whether a unified method has ever really succeeded in shedding much light on anything—and if, on the other hand, philosophy insists on attempting to shed light in this way, and does not confine itself to issuing guidelines for the sciences, this will lead more or less inevitably to its looking for this light in the individual phenomena, the disiecta membra, remaining from the different systems. If you cast your minds back to those quotations from Benjamin about transience and decay, you will recollect that they should be understood as pointing to the fact that interpretation presupposes the decay of systems. Moreover, inasmuch as those systems contained any truth, that truth has now—if it has not evaporated entirely—retreated into the details, into the individual parts of the system, and now forms the object of study of interpretation or, God help us, hermeneutics. For fidelity to philosophy, the insistence upon the philosophical impulse despite the demise of the system—together with the statement handed down from one philosopher to the next that philosophy is only possible as a system—all that can no longer be sustained in the face of the needs of philosophy. This does not mean that, by sacrificing the overall principle that it should organize the totality of all phenomena, philosophy should also abandon intellect as such. On the contrary, the more we see the erosion of the constitutive character of mind that used to find expression in philosophical systems, the more insistent becomes the need not just to register existing reality, but to reflect upon it and understand it. And it is this that refers us in our search for a philosophical knowledge of individual things to the only source of knowledge that remains, given the present trend towards dispersion and fragmentation, namely towards interpretation, the art of deciphering.

Finally, I should add something about what my own experience tells me is an almost overwhelming need for interpretation. This is the part played by the fact that the avenues that might lead to a
practice that could bring about change are all blocked. The effect this has is to ensure that all the energies that were formerly concentrated in attempts to bring about a novel state of affairs now flow into the process of interpretation. I am familiar with the argument that interpretation is merely a surrogate, a way of foisting people off. I have nothing with which to counter this objection, except for a recurrent idea of Marx’s to the effect that it is not open to any way of thinking arbitrarily to escape from the historical situation in which it finds itself. If thought finds itself locked into a situation in which practice is blocked so that interpretation is the only activity left open to it, it would be an illusion and pure self-deception for philosophy to react otherwise. That would be a sort of justification of Alexandrianism of which I am sure I am as well aware as any of you. The problem here, however, lies not so much with thinking itself as with the relation to the objective situation in which thought finds itself.\(^{18}\) Nowadays, at any rate, the joy of thinking lies in interpretation. The conception of interpretation, the sudden moment of insight, is what everyone hopes to ‘studying’ philosophy. Anyone who is unwilling to undertake this, who has never experienced the pleasure of interpretation personally, should leave philosophy alone, at any rate, the only philosophy that seems to be possible today. I would say that interpretation is the only thing that could inspire people to ‘do’ philosophy today. With this shrinking of trust in theoretical system-building, it may be that the greater the pressure or the desire to interpret it and to have done with this meaninglessness. The light that is kindled in the phenomena as they fragment, disintegrate and fly apart is the only source of hope that can set philosophy alight: for philosophy, as I have been suggesting in these lectures, is the Stygian darkness that sets out to unveil meaning. It would be much more important to explain this idea than to obey the impulse to deduce or to take philosophical possession of the totality. All that has now ceased to be philosophy; instead we have the immersion in the individual detail, that unreserved immersion in the individual, specific detail that Hegel called for but that he also repudiated in his actual intellectual practice. Heidegger comes very close to the idea of interpretation, but it is corrupted — so it appears to me — because it is committed to the distinction between the ontic and the ontological, while the ontological structure turns out to be something other than what we might truly think of as ‘meaning’. At bottom, it is nothing more than the multiplicity of universal concepts to which specific phenomena are to be adapted. And it is this process of ‘adapting’ that philosophical interpretation is supposed to transcend. That, to put it dogmatically, is what distinguishes the art of interpreting the signs of the philosophy of history from the hermeneutics fashionable today. I should like to continue next time from the point we have now reached and then conclude what I have to say about the philosophy of history by giving you an even larger backdrop relating to one of its most central categories, one in which all our previous discussions can be said to culminate — and that is the concept of progress.

\(^{19}\) Enrico Castelli, the Italian philosopher, has written a fascinating book about the way in which the metaphysics of time is built on the loss of time.\(^{20}\) Unfortunately, his book has remained largely unknown in Germany.\(^{21}\) The emptier of meaning existing reality appears today, the greater the pressure or the desire to interpret it and to have done with this meaninglessness. The light that is kindled in the phenomena as they fragment, disintegrate and fly apart is the only source of hope that can set philosophy alight: for philosophy, as I have been suggesting in these lectures, is the Stygian darkness that sets out to unveil meaning. It would be much more important to explain this idea than to obey the impulse to deduce or to take philosophical possession of the totality. All that has now ceased to be philosophy; instead we have the immersion in the individual detail, that unreserved immersion in the individual, specific detail that Hegel called for but that he also repudiated in his actual intellectual practice. Heidegger comes very close to the idea of interpretation, but it is corrupted — so it appears to me — because it is committed to the distinction between the ontic and the ontological, while the ontological structure turns out to be something other than what we might truly think of as ‘meaning’. At bottom, it is nothing more than the multiplicity of universal concepts to which specific phenomena are to be adapted. And it is this process of ‘adapting’ that philosophical interpretation is supposed to transcend. That, to put it dogmatically, is what distinguishes the art of interpreting the signs of the philosophy of history from the hermeneutics fashionable today. I should like to continue next time from the point we have now reached and then conclude what I have to say about the philosophy of history by giving you an even larger backdrop relating to one of its most central categories, one in which all our previous discussions can be said to culminate — and that is the concept of progress.
Last time I had begun to tell you about the transition from philosophy to the concept of interpretation. Today, I should like to finish off what was inevitably an all too cursory account of that transition before moving on to establish a bridge between the two parts of these lectures — and of course there is no need to explain to wily dialecticians like yourselves that this bridging exercise does not create a link between the two parts, but must effect a mediation within the two parts themselves. If you reflect on what I have said to you about philosophical interpretation, you will perhaps be able to see why I have placed such great emphasis upon the theory of natural history. It is because this interweaving of nature and history must in general be the model for every interpretative procedure in philosophy. We might almost say that it provides the canon that enables philosophy to adopt an interpretative stance without lapsing into pure randomness. For it retains the polarity that is essential to philosophy, that is to say, the combination of the stringent, the authoritative, with the element of living experience or expression, even though these two elements can never harmonize entirely. The fragmentation of philosophy into so-called schools — of rationalism or empiricism — that are constantly at loggerheads with each other has as its background the insoluble nature of this tension, behind which the insoluble problem of dissolving non-identity into identity may well lie. The relationship of nature and history provides us with the primal image of interpretative behaviour, something that has been handed down through intellectual history in the form of allegory. It is hardly a coincidence that the first philosophy
to have emphasized the concept of interpretation and to have developed it as a methodological principle on a large scale was that of the middle and later Schelling, who himself made extensive reference to allegory, a concept that has since fallen into disfavour in aesthetics. Beneath this gaze, the profound gaze of allegory, which is perhaps the model for the philosophical gaze as such - because the attitude of melancholic contemplation may well be the attitude on which philosophical inquiry has been founded - nature stands revealed. Nature, I say, reveals itself beneath this gaze as history, just as in all allegory the death's head owes its central importance to the fact that it is a natural object its own expression reveals its historical nature. Conversely - and I would remind you here of the passage from Benjamin's writings that I read out to you in one of the recent lectures" - beneath this gaze history stands revealed as nature in so far as it turns out to be permanent transience. Moreover, the recollection of the past, the memory in the phenomenon itself, is the mode of behaviour, or what we might almost, following Hölderlin, call the scheme according to which interpretation can take place. At the same time, as a form of melancholy which perceives transience in everything historical, this attitude is also critical.

We might even say in general that the transition from philosophy to criticism represents something like a secularization of melancholy. This is a melancholy that has become active, not a melancholy that makes do, that remains stuck fast in an unhappy consciousness, not at home with itself, but a consciousness that exteriorizes itself as a critique of existing phenomena. Such a melancholy is probably the pre-eminent critical, philosophical stance. In other words, if you read the phenomena of history as the cyphers of their own transience or their own natural deterioration, they will always also be defined by their own negativity. This element of negativity is the element of criticism in philosophy. Interpretation and critique come together at a profound level. This explains why I find it foolish to demand that we should first understand a thing and only then criticize it. For since the process of understanding and interpreting entails negation, a consciousness of the immanent demise of a phenomenon is at one with the criticism of what the world has done to it. In general terms, we might say that interpretation means reading nature from history and history from nature. Interpretation teases out of the phenomena, out of second nature, out of what has been mediated, out of the world around us that has been mediated by history and society, the fact that they have evolved - in just the same way as it shows that there can be no evolution without the process being convicted of its own naturalness, while the evolution itself, mediation, must be understood as a prolonged state of immediacy, a natural condition. The two aspects belong together. You may say that each is present in the other; in other words, nature is present in history as transience, a proposition I spent the entire first part of these lectures explaining to you. Conversely, we shall also be able to say that history is present in nature as something that has evolved and is transient. At the same time, however, because these two aspects are indissolubly linked, every interpretation is also posited - and I believe that anyone who, like me, emphasizes the standpoint of immanent interpretation and criticism is obliged to refrain from making a fetish of this immanence. For in order to liberate this immanence, to appropriate its power, we need the knowledge of what is other. This means that the deep melancholic gaze of which I have spoken will be able to discover the element of becoming, or of having become, in what has evolved, only if it can bring to the contemplation of phenomena the consciousness of that process of becoming. In my writings I have illustrated this with an example from Hölderlin and I would like to refer you to his poem The Shelter at Hardt, the meaning of which only becomes completely clear when you understand its specific references - the fact that this was the allegorical place where Duke Ulrich of Württemberg is reputed to have hidden while making his escape, and that, according to Hölderlin, the place itself is made to speak of this. Only when you know this is it possible to understand the poem completely; whereas this reference [to Duke Ulrich], as Friedrich Beissner has explained it, has some of the disturbed character that people were more likely to see in Hölderlin's poems than their specific content.

On the other hand, however, this vanishing of history into nature that we have seen in Hölderlin's poem is also an element of expression assumed by nature. This means that only because these pragmatic [historical] elements have disappeared, only because the poem has acquired this enigmatic character, has it succeeded in assuming the expression of transience that points beyond itself and constitutes its greatness. I should like to ask you all to read The Shelter at Hardt, this late poem of Hölderlin's. There is, I believe, no better model for what I mean by the interlocking of nature and history in a phenomenon, in this instance from the realm of poetry.

Interpretation, I said, is criticism of phenomena that have been brought to a standstill; it consists in revealing the dynamism stored up in them, so that what appears as second nature can be seen to be history. On the other hand, criticism ensures that what has evolved loses its appearance as mere existence and stands revealed as the product of history. This is essentially the procedure of Marxist critique (if I may briefly make mention of this here). Marxist critique
consists in showing that every conceivable social and economic factor that appears to be part of nature is in fact something that has evolved historically. Thus there is always an element of reciprocity: what appears to be natural is discovered to be historical, while things that are historical turn out to be natural because of their transience. Behind this phenomenon stands the historicized dialectic of subject and object which cannot be reduced to their pure state. To destroy immediacy means dissolving the appearance of naturalness [Anschließen] through the critical process. It means demolishing the claim that phenomena that have evolved [in time] are just what they are [in the present]. I have not drawn your attention to all the specific arguments in Hegel that have formed starting-points for my own remarks, but it seems to me that here Hegel has fallen victim to a certain illusion inasmuch as he has given his theory of the way in which immediacy constantly reasserts itself an excessively positive reading. He is undoubtedly in the right when he maintains that, in phenomena that have finished evolving, the process of evolution, its history, disappears or - to use the expression of Hegel's that I quoted in these lectures a few hours ago - becomes second nature. The more thoroughly this process of evolution disappears, the greater the appearance of a second nature, of sheer natural existence. You need think here only of the realm of pure reason, pure logic. What characterizes logic in the first instance is that the traces of its evolution, that is to say, the subjective aspect of synthesis, are scarcely visible any more and an extreme mental effort is called for if they are to be perceived and retrieved. Having said this, however, which anyway is rendered more clear by the Hegelian arguments, we should add that this evolved immediacy, this second immediacy, is still only an illusion. By this I mean that it hides something, that because it is a concealed history it seals off the dynamism contained within itself. The mistake Hegel makes here, if I may speak in this schoolmasterly way, is that, because this second nature is impenetrable, he is tempted to place it on the same logical plane as the first. In other words, he is tempted to treat it as something immediate without any reservations whereas, precisely because it postulates itself as immediate without actually being so, it inevitably conceals its own history and thus degenerates into ideology. We might even say that - setting aside the familiar but superficial political and ontological distinctions between the two men - this is the real difference between Hegel and Marx. Marx always takes the historical nature of the second, third and fourth immediacy, that is to say, of second nature, far more seriously than Hegel, who tends simply to accept that something that has evolved then disappears into the evolved reality. So that for Hegel all this means is that, with the demonstration of mediation, immediacy ends up at every stage as no more than a piece of subjectivity, as an instance of mind, as something postulated by mind. With Marx, on the other hand, the tendency is for the negativity contained in the very naturalness of immediacy, of a later, mediated, evolved immediacy, to come to the surface; he assigns to the reflective mind the task of dispelling this illusion of naturalness and, in contrast, of uncovering the true reality in the hidden laws of motion, in what lies concealed, what does not lie on the surface - while the façade shrivels into mere illusion. If it does not sound too pompous, we might say that this is a kind of metaphysical and dialectical interpretation of the relationship between dialectic and ideological critique. Besides, it is not by chance that the sphere of art should be the sphere in which something that is most perfectly thesei, that is to say, something that has become or has been made, presents itself as physei, i.e., as natural. Nor need we be astonished that the sphere of art which is remarkable for the fact that in it objects that have been created should present themselves as purely immediate, as being, should have declared itself to be the realm of semblance, illusion, while actuality, where we find the same encapsulation of the production process as in art, fails to acknowledge its own status as semblance. Indeed, if I may be allowed to exaggerate the position, it is in a sense far more illusory than art, since art turns the relationship between appearance and reality into a focus of attention and gives it expression.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have spoken of the joys of interpretation. Now that I am coming to an end of my discussion of this topic, let me say another few words about this. Perhaps what I have said about the joys of interpretation will by now have become a little clearer to you. These joys consist in refusing to be blinded by the semblance of immediacy, and instead in uncovering the process by which the work became what it is so that we may transcend that semblance. At the same time, they refer to the power of the mind to retain its self-control in the face of the sorrow that is aroused by the contemplation of the past. Kant had noted, in one of the profoundest passages in the aesthetics of the sublime, that what a common-or-garden aesthetics customarily thinks of as aesthetic ‘pleasure’ is in reality a state in which the mind remains in control of itself in the face of the overwhelming power of nature, in the face of total transience. Thus the joy of philosophy - and philosophy should not deny this pleasure, but shed light on it and make it its own - is connected with the activity of interpretation. In fact, we are capable of experiencing this pleasure only in so far as we are capable of this act of interpreting. When it comes down to it, the source of this pleasure lies in the fact
that the phenomena – and I mean the phenomena in their most concrete form, the form in which they have all the colourfulness that children desire, that children focus upon, for all happiness comes from our childhood – our pleasure derives from the fact that the phenomena always mean something different from what they simply are. Thus interpretation leads us to break through their surface existence. The deepest promise interpretation makes to the mind is perhaps the assurance it gives that what exists is not the ultimate reality – or perhaps we should say: what exists is not just what it claims to be. We might say, then, that the negativity of natural history – which always discovers what phenomena used to be, what they have become and, at the same time, what they might have been – retains the possible life of phenomena as opposed to their actual existence. In this sense, the interpretative stance in philosophy is the prototype of a utopian stance towards thought. And philosophies that remain true to this utopian motif have always had a soft spot for interpretation. Interpretation in fact means to become conscious of the traces of what points beyond mere existence – by dint of criticism, that is to say, by virtue of an insight into transience, and into the shortcomings and fallibility of mere existence.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is really all I propose to say to you about the relationship between the philosophy of history and interpretation. I should now like to conclude this part of the lecture course by discussing a category that both encapsulates the entire problem of the philosophy of history and also forges a link between it and the philosophy of history progress had served as the mediating link between the spheres of necessity and freedom in the sense that the natural antagonism between human beings, the fact that *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf to other men, compel people to throw off the mechanism of compulsion and to establish something that might be called a ‘realm of freedom’. But instead of attempting to provide a theoretical underpinning of these ideas on the philosophy of history that I have tried to explain to you, or to synthesize them with the theory of freedom, I would prefer to say something about progress – by way of a conclusion and so as to give you a somewhat concise idea of this view of history.

In order to give an account of the concept of progress, I shall have to subject it to a scrutiny close enough to ensure that it loses its obvious meaning, both positive and negative. After everything I have said about interpretation as the insistence on what phenomena and even concepts say over and above what they do say, this probably does not call for further explanation. We must therefore put the concept of progress under the microscope, as it were, so as to strip it of its semblance of naturalness, its semblance of being a second nature. But examining it in close-up makes a proper assessment difficult. More even than other concepts, that of progress evaporates as soon as you begin to specify what actually progresses and what doesn’t. The more you insist on knowing this, the less remains of the concept. I should like to take advantage of this for a philosophical or conceptual digression. The fact is that the function of nominalism has undergone a far-reaching change – this has to be said if we are to make a meaningful criticism of nominalism. Nominalism is tied to the tradition of enlightenment and the history of enlightenment since the Middle Ages is identical with nominalism. That is to say, it is denied that concepts have a natural existence and this means that they are to be treated as no more than the summation of particular characteristics. In consequence, there has been a growing demand that concepts should be able to give proof of their identity; we must be able to say what a concept means and how it is to be used. I hope that you will all have long since abandoned the vulgar practice you will constantly come across in naïve discussions of saying, ‘Well, if you want to talk about progress or freedom, you will have to begin by defining what you mean by them.’ This habit is an extreme distortion of a venerable enlightenment motif and I hope that I have managed to put you off it. It is a distortion because nowadays this nominalist insistence on defining your terms has long since ceased to serve the purpose of stripping concepts of their magic aura, their character as shibboleths. Instead, pedants who insist on doing this deprive others of the use of whatever true, substantive elements are contained in concepts, of the essential, structured aspects of phenomena that lie within concepts. To give you a drastic example of what I mean you have only to imagine a sociological discussion in which someone makes use of the word ‘class’. In no time at all, someone will say that you can no longer use the word ‘class’; nowadays you have to talk about different strata, and these strata have to be defined very precisely, and so forth. It then becomes clear that what used to be an attempt to make more careful distinctions has ended up as the wish to sabotage the critical function of concepts by claiming that their negative aspect simply does not exist. Quite recently Herr Ludwig Marcuse published an unfavourable critique of my writings in the *Welt der Literatur*. In this he pretended not to know the difference between true consciousness and false, and demanded that I give him a definition. He seemed to be attacking me because I had
failed to provide him with such a definition -- even though in reality I certainly could give him one. It is a simple matter of distinguishing between truth and ideology, in other words, between a consciousness that is appropriate to the current state of society and one that conceals it. However, his real motive was not to seek information but to deny me the use of that distinction with the aid of a farrago of pseudo-epistemological reflections. That is the only thing that forces us into a certain wariness when objections are raised in a nominalist spirit instead of tackling the substance of the question at issue. That is to say, such objections attempt to deny us the use of a concept by disputing that the phenomena it covers really constitute a unity. As an experienced paterfamilias I would strongly recommend you in such cases to reply to people who demand to know exactly what freedom is, or progress, that they know precisely what these things are, and that, however vague the general notions about such concepts are, they contain a great deal more truth than attempts to evade the concepts and to deny their validity. The best remedy when confronted with such questions -- my home-made medicine chest, so to speak -- when someone asks what freedom is, is to tell him that he needs only to think of any flagrant attack on freedom. In most cases this is enough to deflate epistemological exercises that have degenerated into self-justifying sophistry. In the first instance, I am content to be able to say of freedom -- by this I mean political freedom, not the free will -- that being free means that, if someone rings the bell at 6.30 a.m., I have no reason to think that the Gestapo or the GPU or the agents of comparable institutions are at the door and can take me off with them without my being able to invoke the right of habeas corpus.\footnote{14} I believe that this is in general the way to deal with objections of this sort.

The concept of progress is particularly prone to such acts of sabotage. It dissolves more readily than others as soon as we have to specify what it actually means; what progresses and what does not. Let me say right away that, in the case of progress, this has its justification.

In other words, there are things that progress and others that do not. I would like to apply this to our reflections on the history of philosophy. In particular, the course of history as a whole thinks of itself as progressive in many respects, and actually is so. Nevertheless, as I believe I have shown, in its natural course it remains constantly the same. The question, therefore, of what is progress and what is not goes to the heart of our reflections about the concept. But whoever wishes to define the concept more precisely risks destroying the very thing he aims at. The subaltern cunning that refuses to speak of progress before we can distinguish between progress in what, of what, and in relation to what, displaces the unity of different elements that constantly modify each other in the concept; this cunning reduces that unity to a mere juxtaposition that is supposed to separate them out from one another in a purifying process of sharp definition. A self-opinionated epistemology that insists on precision where it is not possible to iron out ambiguities, sabotages our understanding and helps to perpetuate the bad by zealously prohibiting reflection upon whether progress is taking place or not -- a question to which all those caught up in an age of both utopian and destruc-

tive possibilities would dearly like an answer. Like every philosophical term 'progress' has its ambiguities; but, as in every term, these ambiguities testify to a common element. What we should think of progress in the here and now is something we know vaguely, but also quite accurately. I am no friend of Brecht's injunction, one that he often put forward in my conversations with him, that what was wanted was simplification. On the contrary, I believe that it is not for nothing that the term simplification is associated with Jacob Burckhardt's \textit{mot} about the 'terribles simplificateurs'.\footnote{15} And I believe that whoever wishes to resist totalitarian habits of thought must resist the temptation to simplify. But there are quite definite concepts where you cannot get by without a certain measure of simplification if you want to avoid the pitfalls of ideology. It is necessary to employ these concepts with the same simplicity and brutality as the reality to which they refer. We must differentiate as much as we can, but where the bestiality and the primitive nature of reality speak, we should take care not to lend them a helping hand by indulging in an excess of differentiation. I can still remember the early days of fascism in Germany when a sociologist\footnote{16} who later became very famous sought to persuade me of all sorts of distinctions between fascism and National Socialism. I won't even say that these distinctions were wholly lacking in validity, particularly since the two phenomena arose in different societies at different times. But ultimately these distinctions were superseded by the actions of Hitler and Mussolini and exposed for what they really are, namely, an evasive manoeuvre. Similarly, today, one of the core stratagems of ideology when you offer a trenchant critique of something is for people to reply, 'Yes, but things are not really like that, you must take this and that factor into consideration' -- and they end up wriggling out of it. It is my view that, instead of always trying to cut off every individual head of the hydra, we should pay heed to the general principle at work. That is what I mean when I speak of the common factor in the ambiguities of the concept of progress.