

In conclusion, it should be noted that here we have not demonstrated the other historic and systematic component of this rational non-contradictory of a new type produced by modern science: the dialectical instance already implicit (albeit in a still dogmatic form) in the very first theory of classifying or epistematic thought to appear in the history of philosophy: Plato's gnoseology of diairesis, target of Aristotle's critique. Here it may be sufficient simply to recall the substantial positive lesson bequeathed us by the self-critical Plato (a lesson ignored by Aristotle the analyst, and therefore absent from his analytic instance and not understood by Hegel the dialectician): in the concrete, in real discourse, it is impossible to avoid contradiction without being conscious of it; in other words, without tauto-heterology or dialectic. It is the character of opposition of the differences which, by making the differences equal sections of the (participating) genus, is posited as that criterion—of their assimilation or *unity*—without which these differences would not be parts-*species*; in short, without which there would be no justification for their validity, or for (non-) contradiction as *rational* partition or distinction.

Italian Hegelianism: Croce and Gentile

1

The reader of Benedetto Croce's *Logica come scienza del concetto puro*¹ is struck, from the very first chapter, by the disproportion between the author's intentions and his achievements. It is not at all difficult to assess the validity of Croce's claim to have critically re-examined the problem of a priori synthesis, to have gone beyond Hegel's synthesis of opposites. At the very beginning of the first chapter we are told: 'If man was not picturing something, he would not be thinking.' But the same chapter concludes with this 'affirmation of the concept': 'The concept . . . arises from representations as something *implicit* in them that must be made *explicit*' (p. 12). Leibniz again!

All of the *Logica*, indeed Croce's entire philosophy, is but a systematic exhibition of this contrast between critical intentions and dogmatic results. In the sentence just quoted, for example, Croce, however dissatisfied with Hegel he may be, falls back into Hegel's—pre-critical—conception of sensation as implicit, indistinct, and confused thought. Further on (p. 96), we are told that 'the birth of the concept transfigures the representations out of which it arises, and renders them other than what they were: determinate instead of indeterminate, logical instead of fantastic, clear and distinct instead of clear but indistinct'. And this despite Croce's own theory of the autonomy of intuition, of the aesthetic, wherein lies, Croce himself maintains, Kant's 'advance' over Leibniz: the refutation of the theory of the beautiful as confused concept and the recognition of the need for a 'qualitative' distinction between the two spiritual forms.²

¹ *Logic As Science of the Pure Concept*, Bari, 1928, fifth edition, p. 3.

² *Problemi di estetica*, Bari, 1923, second edition, p. 54.

We shall see that Croce's Logic may serve as the basis for an assessment of the validity of his Aesthetics and of his entire philosophy of the spirit as a circle of distinctions. Indeed, does not Croce adopt Hegel's dictum that in every judgement 'all reality is predicated of the subject' and that 'only the totality of predicates, the full concept of the real, the spirit, or the idea, is sufficient'?

But let us examine systematically Croce's treatment, central as it is, of the identity of the defining and individual judgement (or perception).

He begins with the usual good intention: 'Are not those things that are called *contingent* equally as *necessary* as those that are called necessary? With good reason we scoff at those who claim that things could have happened differently from the way they did. In truth, Caesar and Napoleon are just as necessary as quality and becoming.'³ If we then consider definition in its concrete reality, we will 'always find, if we look with care, the representative element and the individual judgement.'⁴ But having stated that 'although the subject in the individual judgement is a representation, it is also true that this representation is not found in it as it would be in an *aesthetic contemplation*; it is instead the subject of a judgement, and is therefore not a *pure and simple representation*, but a representation that is thought—in other words, an instance of logic',⁵ Croce then proceeds to the following demonstration that defining and individual judgements are identical.

'Every definition is a response to a question, a solution to a problem. . . . But the question, the problem, the doubt, is always considered individually. . . . In reality, each question differs from all others, and each definition . . . differs from all others, because the words, even when they seem substantially the same, actually differ according to the spiritual diversity of those who utter them, for they are individuals and therefore always find themselves in individually determined circumstances. "Virtue is disposition towards moral actions" is a formula which . . . , every time it is uttered in earnest as a definition of virtue, corresponds to more or less diverse *psychological* situations; in reality, it is not one, but thousands and thousands of definitions. . . . Every concept exists only to the extent that it is thought and completed in words, that is, to the extent that it is

defined. And if the definitions vary, then so does the concept. These are, of course, variations of the concept, which means of identity *par excellence*; they form the life history of the *concept* and not at all of the representation. . . . Once we grant that every thought of the concept, which means every definition, is individually and historically conditioned (from which conditionality arises the doubt, problem, or question to which the definition responds), then we must likewise grant that the definition, which contains the response and affirms the concept, thereby simultaneously illuminates that individual and historic conditionality, that group of facts from which it emerges. To say that it illuminates it is to say that it qualifies it as what it is, apprehends it as a subject by affording it a predicate, judges it. And since the fact is always individual, it forms an individual judgement. In other words, every definition is simultaneously an individual judgement. . . . The logical act, the thought of the pure concept, is unique; it is the identity of definition and individual judgement.'⁶

Three objections to this argumentation may be advanced.

First, it is naively dogmatic to attempt to reconcile the truth of reason with the truth of fact simply by noting that the thought that defines the fact arises under varying *psychological* conditions (spiritual diversity). The threat of *petitio principii* here is constant. We have, for example, a 'problem' that is individual and always diverse *because* it corresponds to 'more or less *diverse* psychological situations', and a 'fact' that is 'individually and historically conditioned' *because* 'the fact is always *individual*'. But how to justify the individual and historic character of the 'definition', inasmuch as it is the 'solution' of that 'problem' and the 'judgement' of that 'fact'?

Second, this naive and defective description of logicity as representation that is thought finds its point of departure and ground in the concept of the aesthetic as 'pure and simple representation', that is, in the typically psychological but nonetheless external and *insufficient* concept of a *pure intuition* (which therefore cannot be a philosophically adequate intuition). See, for example, *Problemi di estetica* (p. 486): 'Given any sensation, if I do not abandon myself to the attractions and repulsions of impulse and sentiment . . . , I find myself in the same disposition as when I enjoy what is usually called a work of art. I live the sensation, but as pure contemplating spirit.'

³ *Logica*, p. 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129-130.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-135.

Third, the insistence that the logical act nevertheless possesses the Hegelian character of 'thought of the pure concept', with its unity or (abstract) identity, is but the natural consequence of Croce's failure to perform the *critical* task he set himself when he identified defining and individual judgements. Exactly because Croce psychologizes, in his 'pure intuition', the Kantian 'disinterested aesthetic' that was his starting-point, he is compelled, as we have seen above, to accept the *rationalistic* notion of the aesthetic as implicit concept, and he therefore returns inevitably to the 'pure concept' of the Hegelian type, despite his rejection of synthesis a priori as purely *logical* synthesis a priori (as Hegel's synthesis of opposites). As we shall see, Croce's logical position becomes even worse with his romantic development of aesthetics.

Given these preliminaries, Croce's approach to the problem of the existential character of judgements will not be surprising. He states at the outset that the question of existentiality arises only for the individual judgement, 'within which there is a representative element, something individual and finite'. Indeed, for the individual and finite, 'essence *does not coincide* with existence; mutable at any moment, while nonetheless always universal, only the infinite is adequate to it'.⁷ After this admonition—which is substantially correct, provided that what is meant, rigorously, is that given the preceding identification of definition and perception, or individual judgement, the question of existentiality is posed for *every* judgement (but he excepts, with the pure defining judgement, 'which is concept and has existence as concept, i.e. as essence', the defining judgement of pseudo-concepts, 'which is not even thought')—Croce proceeds to determine the precise significance of 'existence' and 'existential' by subdividing the *representative* element (which was cited above as characteristically determining the existentiality of the judgement inasmuch as it appeared as wholly identical to its individuality and finitude into the representation 'indifferent' to existence characteristic of the 'intuitive man', of the artist, and the 'no longer indifferent' representation of the 'logical man', who 'cannot judge that which does not exist'.⁸ The consequence of this distinction is just this: 'existence, in the individual judgement, is predicated'; it is 'the *concept* of a reality that duplicates itself in both *actual* and *possible* reality, in *existence* and *non-existence*, or mere

⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

⁸ Ibid.

representability' (hence in the case of aesthetic judgements, 'there is effectuality, reality, the existence of images, having the ineffectual and non-existent as their content'); and, in sum, every judgement requires 'the entirely determined universal . . . as essence in the entire extension of this concept, which *includes* existence'.⁹ Any distinction between defining and individual judgement thereby vanishes, but this time not in the sense maintained above (however uncertainly); in other words, not in the sense of a conciliation of the two on the basis of mutual determination, but rather in the sense that the former absorbs the latter, or makes it equivalent to itself. This, however, leads straight back to Hegel. (This *reaction* of Croce's to the problem of existence is surely characteristic and instructive.)

Also of typically Hegelian stamp, despite the pragmatist veneer, is the theory of pseudo-concepts (like triangle, rose, and so on) and of the corresponding *pseudo-judgements*, so closely connected to the theory of the existentiality of the individual judgement. A typical negative consequence of the external dichotomy of the representative element, it disparages the empirical and intuitive character and the existentiality of those concepts it dubs merely conceptual 'fictions', the Hegelian purity of which could not be more evident. Thus it is that Croce admits, betraying a confusion that is surely significant, that 'empirical judgements'—those 'practical' fictions—rest, in the final analysis, on existentiality (by which he means 'on the *concept* of existentiality') since 'they do not constitute pseudo-concepts of possibility'.¹⁰

Thus Croce, turning back to Hegel, and even to the scholastics, maintains that existence is only a predicate, a concept, and he dismisses as mere dogmatic realists both Hume, who holds existence to be a 'belief' and thus a 'feeling' or 'sensation', and the Kant of 1763, who affirmed that existence 'is not at all predicated of something'.

Finally, all Croce's uncertainties and weaknesses are manifested, quite naturally, in his formulation of the logical principle: unity-distinction as a circular linkage of distinctions. He accepts the principle of identity and non-contradiction, but not in the sense that 'A is A alone and is not also not-A, its opposite'; for understood in this way 'it leads one directly to posit the negative moment outside the positive, not-being apart from or opposite to being, and therefore

⁹ Ibid., pp. 109-113, 372.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 118.

to the absurd conception of reality as immobile and empty . . . a perversion of the principle'.¹¹

In sum, he accepts Hegel's dialectical version of the principle of non-contradiction, with all the historic errors this implies, in opposition to the principle as formulated by Aristotle. In an attempt to escape from the absolute identity of Parmenidean being, Croce asserts a renovated Eleaticism and Platonism in the name of anti-Eleaticism! (At the bottom of all this, of course, lies the careless identification of the traditional scholastic principle of identity—and its formalist-rationalist treatment of Aristotle's principle—with the so-called Parmenidean principle of identity.) And yet Croce, almost incidentally, recognizes that on the contrary it is the 'individual judgement' that 'excludes its contradictory'.¹² On the other hand, although he substantially accepts the principle of identity in its Hegelian version (or rather *perversion*, in this case the term seems justified), at bottom Croce generally does not consider himself a consistent Hegelian, for his critical intentions prevent this. He rejects the 'false extension' of the dialectical principle (the defect of which is 'the complete loss of the criterion of distinction'), convinced that he can philosophically conciliate the two principles through the theory that 'distinctions as such are distinctions and not opposites; and opposites cannot be, because they bear opposition in themselves: aesthetic fantasy bears within itself its opposite, fantastic passivity, which is the ugly; and thus this is not the opposite of thought, which in its turn bears within itself its opposite, logical passivity, anti-thought, the false'.¹³

This is an explanation, but not a justification, given Croce's typically empirical, external, and psychological conception of distinction. Otherwise he would have understood that opposition, the dialectic, conceived in the manner of Hegel, does not tolerate distinctions as such and absorbs everything into its unifying thirst (does he not acknowledge that 'opposites are not concepts, but the *sole* concept itself?'). To resolve the inevitable problem of the transition from one distinction to another, Croce is compelled to concoct a psychological duplicate of the dialectic in the form of a 'law of life as a whole', which is the 'transition' inherent in 'all the existential and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 63.

¹² Ibid., p. 107.

¹³ Ibid., p. 64.

contingent determinations of each of these forms [the distinctions]', such that, for example, 'existentially, a poet becomes a philosopher only if a *contradiction* to his poetry takes shape in his mind, and thus only if he feels dissatisfied with the individual and the individual intuition; and at that moment there is no transition; rather, he is already a philosopher, because to undergo transition, to be real, and to become are synonyms'. On the other hand, he affirms that distinctions, as 'ideal moments', 'do not pass into each other, because they are eternally distinct the one in the other and the one with the other'.¹⁴ It thus seems clear that (here again) he oscillates between a reduction of distinctions to opposites (the ideal moments, which are in each other, and are therefore the *sole* concept that opposites are) and a *petitio principii*: the moments do not pass into the other *because* they are distinct from one another in any case.

It is thus confirmed, in the final analysis, that Croce's approach to the problem of distinctions has from the very outset been compromised by his inadequate—because purely psychological—conception of the autonomy or positivity of aesthetics, for indeed only a genuinely rigorous recognition of sensibility or aestheticity and its 'indispensability' for the 'intellect' (to use Kant's expression) can break the spell of the theory of truth as synthesis of opposites, or pure concept (pure self-consciousness). Ultimately, however, this would require avoiding the plunge into romantic aesthetics in which Croce indulges with his concept of art as '[pure] intuition of a cosmic character'; which concept is replaced, through the psychologistic reduction of aesthetic intuitivity or disinterestedness to ineffability, by the sameness, i.e. uniqueness or singularity, of sensation or intuition with the sameness, i.e. unity or universality, of the idea, and concludes with the possession—in the intuited or ineffable—of the pure (poetic) universal or pure oneness (the very same exchange or mistake that occurs in Bergson's 'intuition', whose distinctive characteristic is 'continuity').

The cardinal consequence of all this is that Croce loses sight of that positivity of intuition which Kant considered the very indispensability of intuition, since it is capable of justifying a non-abstract intelligence. It is this intelligence whose concreteness Croce the romantic, who refuses to accord it the fullness of relations with the intuition (which is said to fuel it, although without in turn needing

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

it in order to be intuition), ultimately fails to grasp. Having lost sight of this concreteness, he disregards the concreteness of history itself, of the real world, abandoning himself to the artistic universal, the self-evident and vapid unity which, synonymous as it is with the 'eternal' or supratemporal, amounts merely to the self-evident and vapid unity of romantic mysticism.

It is this *theological* conception of aesthetics that accounts for Croce's falsely concrete rationalism (both his Hegelianism in logic and his more general spiritualism).

2

Giovanni Gentile's *Il sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere* (The System of Logic as Theory of Knowledge) is an attempt to conciliate—but not eclectically, like Croce—the old and the new, the logic of identity and dialectical logic, the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of absolute contradiction. The attempt is made, however, in the framework of Platonic-Hegelian schemata, and despite certain appearances to the contrary, it leaves totally unsatisfied Aristotle's instance that being and truth must be determinate and distinct. It therefore fails to extract us from the predicaments of a defective dialectic.

In this work Gentile strives to abandon his initial conviction, expounded in *L'atto del pensare come atto puro*, §8: 'The principle of identity (or of contradiction), $A = A$, expresses a necessity of what is called abstract thought—i.e. relative to nature—which by definition is the negation of thought and therefore cannot accept any logic of this sort', since logical necessity is characteristic of the 'real and concrete process of thought, which could rather be formulated, schematically, thus: $A = \text{not-}A$ '. Gentile thus sets out to justify the 'old logic' as the theory of that 'thinkable being' which constitutes the response to the Socratic question (*tí estin?*) and is therefore concept, which 'is rather what one thinks it is, and therefore is itself being; but being that is what it is: determinate being having a *particular* content'.¹⁵

The 'nucleus' of logical thought, then, must be, as Plato and Aristotle maintained, the synthesis or unity of the noun and the verb:

¹⁵ *Il sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere*, third edition, 1940, volume I, p. 175.

'in which the noun (A) is not an unthinkable (natural) being, but that being which is because and to the extent that it is thought through the verb ($= A$); neither, therefore, can it be detached from it without vanishing from the realm of the thinkable. To attempt to think, then, is necessarily to maintain the noun within the relationship proper to it, with the verb. The latter's function is precisely to duplicate the simple and abstractly identical unity of the noun, such that *identity* is realized in the concrete. It therefore can and must be said that the noun is distinguished from natural being in that through the verb it is realized as identical to itself.'¹⁶

Moreover, 'although in thought itself we distinguish something that is known as the noun, made a noun by the verb, that is, under the rubric of the concept (an A, which is not yet $A = A$), this abstract noun, in its *lack of distinction*, turns out to be a pure natural being; it is called sensation or intuition. It is the blind material of our knowledge, which is actually presented to consciousness inasmuch as it is illuminated in the concept, through thought, in virtue of which it, once perceived, remains what it was, except that it is reflected in itself and divides in relation to itself with itself, and thereby is known as what it is.'¹⁷

If to think is therefore 'to think something, or to think that being which is something', in other words, 'to fix not only the being, but the being identical to itself', then the fundamental law of the logic of that which is thought, or 'abstract' thought, can only be the principle of identity.

And since the 'objective affirmation' of being as being that is thought 'is, we may say, not only affirmation of thought being, but at the same time *negation* of natural being', and since natural being is only the abstract noun, which stands outside its synthesis with the verb, and this is, as the noun's verb, the assertion of being in thought, i.e. its 'transfiguration' in thought being, it is appropriate to say that 'the noun is affirmed of the verb inasmuch as it is negated: affirmed as thought, negated as being. *Omnis affirmatio est negatio*.'¹⁸ This 'negativity of the verb [or thought] relative to the abstract [noun = sensation]', or negativity that is the 'force' or 'logical value' of the affirmation, embodies the significance of the principle of non-contradiction (in which the affirmation, being

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

posited as the identity of being with itself, is posed as the 'negation of this identity', or negation of that identity which is being in its 'natural immediacy'). It should be noted, however, that being, as the abstract noun of the synthesis, 'does not negate anything, since it has no right to exist; it is absurd'. Furthermore, thought 'consists in the negation of this absurdity and is therefore posed as concept or idea, and no longer as natural being'. And the concept, since it is the concept of this being and must negate it in its immediacy in order to affirm itself, 'is affirmed as the opposite of that immediate being'. Because of this affirmation, 'this being as such, with respect to the concept, is an opposite such that, if it was, the concept would not be, and since the concept is, it is not'. (And it is therefore 'negated as a negative' and 'negates by reflection of the sole real negation, which is that of the concept, in the function of the verb', or predicate.)

Thus, 'if A is A, the being of A consists as much in being A (identical to A) as in not-being not-A (not identical to A)'. But if non-contradiction were really the same as identity, 'affirmation would be pure and simple affirmation without negativity', in which case identity 'would be equivalent to that abstract position of immediate or natural being which is not thought and cannot think'. But it is, on the contrary, thinkable, and differentiates itself from pure primitive being, which 'is accomplished as thought' inasmuch as it 'is not limited to affirming this being ($A = A$), but also negates and annuls the absence of the same being that is not reflected in itself and is not identical with itself': 'thought can find itself in being as concept, but cannot find itself in natural being, because in reality thought never knows anything but itself.'¹⁹

How, then, do the two principles, of identity and non-contradiction, 'form a whole, although without merging into each other'? Gentile answers by distinguishing opposition from opposition. 'There is the opposition of the identical and there is the opposition of the opposite. Given $A = A$, each A, in its own identity, is the opposite of the other; otherwise it would not be identical to the other; in other words, it would not be identical to itself'. Then there is another opposition, under which A is no longer identical to, but is rather the opposite of A: this is 'the immediate and non-resolved opposition of the abstract noun and the natural being which remains outside the identity, absent from thought; the opposition that exists between A

conceived as external to the synthesis $A = A$, and A as element of the synthesis'. And precisely 'the negated opposition of any affirmation is not the opposite, as identical, but the absolutely opposite. Whose being is the not-being of its opposite and whose not-being is the being of its opposite'. Hence, from this unity of identity and non-contradiction emerges the principle of the excluded middle: 'A is either A or not-A; where the either/or expresses the mutual exclusion of the two opposites as such, A and not-A'.²⁰

Nevertheless, although the principle of the excluded middle means that 'there is no third term between the being and the not-being of a concept, such that if a concept is shown to be false, namely non-existent, its negative will be true', this principle also acknowledges that 'the false . . . has no place in the logic of the objective *logos*, except as the immanent negativity of the true'. The false, indeed, is 'the negative whose positivity is a reflexive positivity, because it consists in the negativity of the positive, which the positive itself (the concept) confers on it as other than itself, or its negative opposite'. Therefore: 'not-A is within A; and A as identical to not-A is within A as identical to A: as it is identical in falsity, so its negativity is attributed by truth with respect to A or $A = A$. There is no false without truth: given falsity, the truth must emerge'. Any concept, as 'negation of its negative', is therefore affirmed with 'a circularity that makes the concept a closed system'.²¹

It is commonly held that logical thought can exit from this circularity 'in such a way that there would be another mode of thinking both the concept and its not-being, provided that once its not-being is thought, the concept is no longer thought'. ('In this is alleged to consist the mutual exclusion of opposites as dictated by the principle of the excluded middle.') Contrary to this common belief, however, it must be noted that 'this mutual exclusion, through which the negative becomes the positive and negates its negation, is the reflection into itself of the negation characteristic of affirmation'. In short, the third principle, the difference of which from the other two 'consists in the unity between affirmation and negation that it demonstrates', may be recapitulated in the following formulation: 'Either being or thought: being is the negation of thought, just as thought is the negation of being. But this cannot mean that one can

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 180-183.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 184-185.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 186-187.

choose indifferently between the two, provided that one renounces being, having chosen thought. There is indeed not-A, but as posited of the A that negates it. And not-A therefore cannot be true except in the sense that it is an unreal hypothesis, incompatible with the being of thought'.²²

Although this modification of the traditional logical principles of thought or content (or multiplicity) of thought reduces the excessively gnoseological-metaphysical features (as compared with the excessively *logical*-metaphysical character of Hegel's treatment), it remains typically Hegelian and therefore subject to the very same difficulties. For it also reduces Aristotle's principle of distinction, the fundamental dianoetic law of identity and non-contradiction, to a principle of *unity*, a *rational* law of contradiction. We may note in particular Gentile's effort to preserve the difference between the second and third principles on the one hand and the first on the other, a worthy effort inasmuch as it is intended to show, correctly, that the second and third principles constitute the necessary integration and development of the first, which is also a principle of determination. But the effort rests on the distinction of two sorts of opposition, which collapses immediately with the enunciation of the second, 'immediate' or 'absolute' opposition between not-A, or 'natural' and 'immediate' being, and A (= A), or thought which is also dialectical, like the first A = A (intended, according to our Hegelian, to correct, precisely through its own dialecticity, vacuous Eleatic identity). The end-result is that not-A—not-being, or multiplicity, or natural being—is only a mere reflection into itself of the negation characteristic of affirmation ('of the thought'). In sum, it is an unreal hypothesis incompatible with being (or thought)! It is thus clear that the Aristotelian exigency of the incompatibility of contraries makes its appearance (in the supposed immediate or absolute opposition of not-A and A) only to vanish immediately in the absorbing 'dialecticism' of being or thought and not-being or natural being.

Let us examine the principal consequences of this dialectical reduction of the traditional logical principle.

To begin with, let us see exactly what Gentile means by the circularity and identity of what is thought. There is, he tells us, 'no

answer' to the problem of why A = A, not because the principles are undemonstrable, as Aristotle thought, but 'because the thought of the abstract logos is *always* undemonstrable, for it is ever revolving within the circle in which its principle consists'.²³ Sextus Empiricus's traditional critique of the syllogism is therefore 'highly accurate'. He held that if from the universal 'every man is an animal' one attempts to conclude the particular 'Socrates is an animal', while the universal is founded on particulars through a process of induction, then one is caught in a vicious circle, attempting to extract 'the universal from the particulars by induction, and the particular from the universal through the syllogism'.²⁴ This criticism, 'although it strikes at the Aristotelian syllogism, which claims to be a process leading from one judgement to another, does nothing if not clarify the essence of the logical force of the thought that is thought'. Hence: 'This diallelon, which has always been the bugbear of thought, will be—nay is—the death of *thinking* thought; but it is the life, the fundamental law, of *thought* thought, without which it is impossible to conceive of thinking thought'. And as for the syllogism, 'it is marked by the same diallelon as the highly solid living organism of thought in its logical mediation'.²⁵

Now, 'we have already had occasion to refer more than once to the circularity of thought, which can only be that system which is closed among certain terms, each of which leads to the other. . . . Thought is *determined* through terms, each of which terminates, or limits, thought, repelling it from itself to the other term. And therefore it is closed, and as such *identical* to itself; and it is not pure natural being'. Consequently, 'either one thinks, . . . or one does not think; but when one thinks, thought is such as to link to itself the thought that it thinks: it is a thought that is being, the sole that exists (inasmuch as one is thinking), therefore *universal* and necessary'. By virtue of the law of circularity or identity, 'all the thinkable . . . is itself, for the simple reason that it is *all* the thinkable'. And finally, 'matter, all the matter, of thought, is the concept that is mediated in a closed system, within which it is true because infinite. There is nothing apart from it, to which it must adjust itself. Even error, like its negation, lies within the circle of the system, as immanent

²³ Ibid., II, p. 71.

²⁴ Ibid., I, pp. 249-250.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 250-251.

²² Ibid., pp. 188-189.

negation of affirmation, since it is infinite, since it links the thought that thinks it'.²⁶

It is striking that in this argument the concept of the circularity of thought does not serve to suggest the fruitful concept of the circularity of induction and deduction, which is inherent in the sceptics' criticism of the syllogism, from which this argumentation correctly began (in order to broach the problem of the undemonstrability of that which is thought). Instead this suggestion fades from view, and circularity becomes identical with the concept of system, winding up with a complete misunderstanding of the nature of that which is thought (or multiplicity), namely of the discreteness and determinateness signified by its identity; hence this thought or concept is proclaimed 'infinite', which means indeterminate! And of course, since circularity and identity are synonyms of systematicness and dialecticity, it must inevitably be concluded that thought—and what is thought—is infinite and 'unique' in the sense that it is 'universal', the universal or the one itself, and is 'logical mediation' or the truth itself. What has then become of the *undemonstrability* of what is thought (which is connected to determinateness)?

Naturally, Gentile is convinced that in his concept of the circularity of thought as system, he can make use of the most precious teaching of the concept of circularity as a circle of induction and deduction. But an examination of his theory of judgements, and of his consequent attitude to the problem of the truth of fact and reason, and of induction and deduction, decisively confirms what we have observed above.

Every judgement, he holds, is a *de facto* truth 'by virtue of the subject [A, as terminated term]; just as it is a truth of reason by virtue of the predicate [A, as terminating term] under which the subject is assumed',²⁷ since he holds, critically, that 'every judgement has a sensation for a subject'.²⁸ On the other hand, however, he immediately loses the advantage of this critical acceptance of the concept of subject (of the judgement) by subsequently asserting that the nature of sensation or intuition is 'indistinction', i.e. indistinct 'unity'.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 250, 256, 257, 279.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

²⁹ Cf. *Filosofia dell'arte*, p. 230: 'Beyond the thought that varies it [unity] in its multiplicity; beyond the feeling that constrains this multiplicity in its unity, there is no residue.'

Hence, once again falling into line with Hegel and with all idealism, into the pre-critical concept of the aesthetic as indistinct or confused thought, and thus obliterating Kant's cardinal critique of Leibniz, Gentile considers it legitimate to affirm that 'the same sensation, to the extent that we talk about it, to the extent that it is perceived, i.e. illuminated by the light shed upon it by the predicate'. He then concludes without further ado that 'the colour, the first colour (as first sensation of colour that I experience), since I see it, perceive it, and since it is like $A = A$, like *that* colour, it is no longer the natural fact of my sensation, but is already the reflection into itself of this fact: it is perception or thought, and therefore universal'.³⁰

In the light of this frustration of the positive character of the aesthetic, it is understandable that Gentile also considers it legitimate to regard 'true induction' as 'precisely that induction which refers the judgement to it itself, thus resolving itself in the same syllogism', namely in the *system*.³¹ We can fully gauge the abstract-rationalistic sense of this conception if we remember that Gentile is determined to affirm it both against Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason ('the same motive that inspired Hume in his search for a principle to justify the synthesis that takes place in the judgement of causality') and against Kant's basis for the inadmissibility of existence as a predicate. Thus Gentile writes: 'since thought itself is truth in fact *because* it is truth in reason, there is no need, if there is thought, for the principle of sufficient reason in order to pass from absence to existence. Which [thought], as judgement, is, in its analysis, the terminating term, but it is above all terminated term: in other words, that which, being in its immediacy, would be if it was not already invested by thought and was not therefore itself made thought. Without this there would be that intuition of the given which Kant, polemicizing against the ontological argument, denied could be considered the mark of a concept, namely simple existence'.³²

It is likewise on the basis of the denial of the positivity of the aesthetic that Gentile is constrained to emphasize the unity of the terms of logical thought, to the detriment of their *distinction*, as, for example, when he says that the thought 'the straight line is the shortest distance between two given points' is a true and objective thought 'only if what is thought as a straight line is the same thing that is

³⁰ *Sistema di logica*, I, pp. 233-234.

³¹ Ibid., p. 261.

³² Ibid., pp. 231-232.

thought as the shortest distance between two points . . . , such that the thought of what is the shortest distance between two points must indeed be *different* from the other, enough to serve as a point of support to thought, which would think nothing of the straight line (thus identified with what marks the shortest distance between two points), if it did not have such a point of support; it must be different, but in order *to be identical to it*.³³

It is thus clear that his conception of the circularity of thought as system, rather than as circle of induction and deduction, namely synthesis or circle of 'heterogeneities' (Kant), compels Gentile to elude the distinction of the terms of thought, of subject and predicate; then, in order to account for it, he ultimately resorts to that extrinsic—even illegitimate—factor of the necessity for a point of support, or of departure, so that thought may discourse, or be thought.

If we now compare the 'logic of the abstract' to the 'logic of the concrete', we find that 'between the synthesis ($A = A$) and the synthesis of terms in which the act of the concrete logos is explained and concentrated ($I = \text{not-}I$), there is a *radical* difference, since the one is essentially thought as fact, the other thought as act'. Moreover: 'the synthesis, . . . is fact, because the thought that knows it is a result, the process of which eludes thought itself'.³⁴ We already know what is meant by thought in this context. We know that this difference between thought, or multiplicity, and thinking, or unity, does not exist, or has not been demonstrated by Gentile. We know that the 'fact' reduced to 'system' is no longer fact. Likewise, when we read that 'this identity of A and not- A , which the logic of the abstract rejects as contradiction, is the immanent law of the concrete logos',³⁵ we recall the dialectical identity of A , or thought, and not- A , or natural being, demonstrated above with regard to the second and third principles (within which identity returns willy-nilly to Hegel's elimination of the 'singular which is meant', or the aesthetic *Aufhebung*, since for Gentile himself natural being coincides with sensation).

Likewise, in 'that obscurity . . . called sense or temperament or nature . . . , being itself illuminated by thought itself which corresponds to the first term of the first formula ($I = I$), which expresses the

³³ Ibid., p. 221.

³⁴ Ibid., II, pp. 70-71.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

conception or transcendental thought or thinking thought',³⁶ we recognize the same 'sensation' as 'terminated term' of the thought that is thought. And Gentile, precisely sensing the need to persuade us that to say 'that the I is equal to itself is not intended in the same sense as $A = A$ ', justifies himself by allowing that the second 'is objective identity, which reproduces in the relation of terms the immediacy characteristic of abstract being' and that the former 'is subjective identity, which is not posited, immediate, with respect to a possible object, but is generated, posits itself'.³⁷ Gentile thereby commits a *petitio principii* in regard to the very foundation of his philosophic logic: namely thought 'as object of itself', or 'thinkable', which 'renews in thought the positing of being that is pure being',³⁸ and which is distinct from thought that is not 'object to itself'.

His logic of the abstract thus fails to achieve its aim: to account for 'thinkable' and therefore 'determinate' being, or being having 'a certain content'. And this failure also demolishes his logic of the concrete, which is thereby converted into the doctrine of the pure thinking thought, or pure unity, since there can be no *logic* of pure unity, but only, strictly speaking, its mystique.

Gentile's entire philosophy may thus be assessed. It is a philosophy that, since it is focused on the concept that 'the synthesis makes the thesis possible, creating its own antithesis, in other words, creating itself',³⁹ remains enclosed within the Platonic-Hegelian dogma of truth as dialogue of the soul with itself, or self-consciousness. It is consequently blind not only to the most profound discoveries of Aristotle, but also to those of Kant, not to speak of others.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁸ Ibid., I, p. 175.

³⁹ *L'atto del pensare come atto puro*, §18.

⁴⁰ At this point we may say a few words about Ugo Spirito, perhaps the most noteworthy contemporary legatee of Italian Hegelianism, and of Gentilism in particular: in the sense that his 'problematicism', namely his rejection of the 'synthesis' and his remaining within the antinomy, leads us to the ancient-sceptical origins of Hegelianism, to that classical scepticism about the intellect common to all those who counterpose it to modern (or critical) scepticism about absolute reason. Spirito, of course, views classical scepticism through the prism of modern romantic idealism. Thus it is that on the one hand he repeats, with Sextus Empiricus, that 'reasoning', the intellect, 'deceives', in other words, leads us into insoluble antinomies or perennial 'problematicities'; and on the other hand, while accepting the substance of the Hegelian conviction that (ancient!) scepticism, by rendering the 'rational' finite and therefore

antinomic, in effect creates the 'scab' of 'dogmatism', of 'limitation', in order to be able to 'pick it', he thinks that this operation can occur only through cosmic sentiment (life as 'love') and not through reason. In sum, he is indebted to *Romantik*, concluding in a neo-aestheticism and secular mysticism. This reconfirms, if there was any need, our analysis of the ancient-sceptical origins of Hegelian idealism (and thus of the ancient source of Hegelianism in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Parmenides*) and of the cardinal historic-systematic distinction between ancient and modern scepticism (the believer Pascal came close to the former with his 'Pyrrhonism'; the same is true of all mystics, thanks to their initial scepticism about the world and therefore about the intellect).

On Logical Positivism

The major difficulty in arriving at a proper comprehension and complete critical assessment of the modern formal (or rather, formalized) logic championed by logical positivism lies in its dual character as theory of thought and of language. Once the theory of thought is examined, and its inability to serve as a valid logic, philosophical or otherwise, is demonstrated (for, as we shall see, it leaves the problem of scientific law unresolved), there remains the theory of language, particularly of semiotics, associated most closely with the name of Rudolf Carnap. Excessively abstract and partial, this theory, with its peculiar obsession with 'correct' language, or the language of 'truth', turns a merely technical language (of a mathematical type) into a dogma and thus fails as a general, truly philosophical theory of semiotics (or semantics).

Let us begin with the most general principles of the neo-positivist school, the so-called Vienna Circle, which are intended to provide us the foundations of an 'anti-metaphysical' logic. These principles, as expounded by W.H. Werkmeister, may be summarized as follows.

1. Knowledge is knowledge only in its form; in any cognition, only the form is important, while all the rest is inessential (Moritz Schlick).
2. A proposition has meaning only to the extent that it can be verified (Schlick), and to verify a proposition means only to find out whether or not it accords with the rules established to govern the connections of that proposition in a given language.
3. Knowledge is always empirical, based on that which is given directly (Schlick); moreover, the sense-data of sensation, which lie at the foundation of the edifice erected by this school (the fundamental