A. ELEMENTS

1. Milieu

The purpose of the present exploration is not to deal with the details of Fleck's analysis of the scientific fact and its conceptual components. The purpose is rather to point to some trend in modern philosophy — as a matter of fact formulated at the time of Fleck's writing of this major book — without assuming that Fleck was aware of those trends and their affinity with his own 'style of thinking'. Hence we can say that we are concerned with the whole notion of 'Pre-ideas' (Prä-Ideen) as formulated in several major philosophical presentations, or to take advantage of a historical expression — we are interested in the 'climate of opinion' in which or against which Fleck's theory was formulated. To be sure, when Whitehead uses the term 'climate of opinion' he points to the understanding of the antecedents of a certain world-view. We are more concerned with the contemporary points of view than with that which preceded Fleck. One could say that we are interested in the contemporary milieu, in the philosophical sense, of Fleck's position and its major issues.

Having used here the notion of milieu we are reminded of a lecture given in 1932 by Schrödinger entitled 'Is the Science of Nature Conditioned by Milieu?' Yet the concept of milieu as used in that lecture points rather to certain methods prevailing in a given span of time, as for instance the statistical method applied in one field of science and transferred from that field to another one, with the emphasis that the essence of statistics is "a wise giving up of the knowledge of details". Schrödinger points also to the prevailing trend of modern physics represented by the theory of relativity and the theory of quantum, which he describes as the trend towards turning down accepted views. Since our concern is more with the philosophical background than with the trends made explicit in science, we shall pursue a different line in our exploration of the milieu of Fleck's position.
2. Style of Thinking

The issues dealt with will be mainly the notion of the style of thinking (Denkstil) as a pre-supposition of the formulation of the scientific theory, the notion of the fact and the scientific fact and eventually the reference to reality as it appears in Fleck's work. The last point we shall be making is more by way of anticipation than by way of identifying the climate of opinion — in the contemporary sense of that term.

Speaking in the first place about the style of thinking, let us recall that Fleck does not refer to a personal attitude of a scientist or of a thinker, an attitude which he describes as related to a moment and guided by a personal bias. He wants to detach the style of thinking from the personal aspects which as a matter of fact are endowed with feelings; hence he refers to what he describes as a collective attitude. When we are concerned with exploration of pre-suppositions, we can succeed only through the exploration of the style of thinking. This points to the historical dimension of the style of thinking which, because of its roots in the diachronic dimension, is even described as a compulsion (Zwang) of thinking in accordance with the style. The style of thinking is a guided perception; as every style this too is composed of a certain attitude on the one hand and a certain performance or realisation of that attitude on the other. It is a guided perceiving accompanied by an elaboration which is imbued with an approach grounded in thought and carrying a thematic character applied to that which is perceived. Though there exists the grounding of a style of thinking in the historical development, there are indeed also mutations of the style of thinking. The comprehension within a broad style of thinking makes it impossible to draw a clear line of distinction between that which is concrete and that which is abstract. What we do find is that a certain principle of thinking has to be preferred, since it comprises more particulars and perceives more conjunctions which are conforming to certain compulsion, more to than a different principle of thinking. Hence, the breadth of application of a principle to details becomes one of the criteria for our selection of that principle or of the style. Probably that breadth finds its corresponding supplement in the breadth of the human being, involved in the principle of thinking, though the first applies to that which is perceived while the second has a sociological meaning describe as “intracollective thinking communication”. At this point, Fleck alludes to the affinity between the general structure of the collective of thinking with what is called the world of fashion — which is again a kind of paradigmatic approach independent of this or that content of that which is “modern”.