ADORNO AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PRACTICAL REASON

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ABSTRACT

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The prevailing interpretation of Adorno's work claims that because of his methodological negativity and his political pessimism he not only does not have a theory of practical reason, but also cannot even conceive of the possibility of a rational answer to Kant's question "what should I do?" Habermas, for example, interprets Adorno's work as engaging in the mere "ad-hoc determinate negation" of what exists. In the main, Adorno is taken to have fallen into the trap of a global skepticism regarding reason. On this interpretation Adorno seems to have given up on the possibility of practical reason and what remains of the liberatory potential of the Western Enlightenment. And, though he attempts to maintain a critical orientation toward social reality, his account of reason cannot maintain this orientation consistently; his critical position depends on the very reason that he criticizes and thus devolves into irrationalism, in the form of either a messianic philosophy of history or a foundationalist account of mimesis.

I argue, instead, that Adorno's thought offers a conception of practical reason that avoids these problems, and further allows for both descriptive and normative insights into contemporary western liberal societies and the subjects who constitute and are constituted by such societies. Adorno conceives of the problem of practical reason as the problem of its very possibility and this takes the form of the possibility of experience. I argue that practical reason is possible in the contemporary world as experience that involves the self-conscious engagement with memory and imagination. Practical reason is possible insofar as experience in this sense is possible. Thus, a conception of the practically oriented subject is also possible. Further, through the related

concepts of orientation, interpretation, and expression, I offer a way to conceive of the validity of experience, though not in a way that offers criteria for deciding whether some expression is in fact an expression of a valid interpretation and the result of the appropriate orientation to the inquiry. I show, however, that this seeming inability is in fact an asset in thinking through actual and potential responses to the irrationality of the contemporary world.

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The prevailing interpretation of Adorno's work claims that because of his methodological negativity and his political pessimism he not only does not have a theory of practical reason, but also cannot even conceive of the possibility of a rational answer to Kant's question "what should I do?" Habermas, for example, interprets Adorno's work as engaging in the mere "ad-hoc determinate negation" of what exists. In the main, Adorno is taken to have fallen into the trap of a global skepticism regarding reason. On this interpretation Adorno seems to have given up on the possibility of practical reason and what remains of the liberatory potential of the Western Enlightenment. And, though he attempts to maintain a critical orientation toward social reality, his account of reason cannot maintain this orientation consistently; his critical position depends on the very reason that he criticizes and thus devolves into irrationalism, in the form of either a messianic philosophy of history or a foundationalist account of mimesis.

I argue, instead, that Adorno's thought offers a conception of practical reason that avoids these problems, and further allows for both descriptive and normative insights into contemporary western liberal societies and the subjects who constitute and are constituted by such societies. Adorno conceives of the problem of practical reason as the problem of its very possibility and this takes the form of the possibility of experience. I argue that practical reason is possible in the contemporary world as experience that involves the self-conscious engagement with memory and imagination. Practical reason is possible insofar as experience in this sense is possible. Thus, a conception of the practically oriented subject is also possible. Further, through the related concepts of orientation, interpretation, and expression, I offer a way to conceive of the validity of experience, though not in a way that offers criteria for deciding whether some expression is in fact an expression of a valid interpretation and the result of the appropriate orientation to the

inquiry. I show, however, that this seeming inability is in fact an asset in thinking through actual and potential responses to the irrationality of the contemporary world.

In this introductory chapter, I first address the question of the relevance of Adorno's thinking today. Next, I explicate some key concepts that will be employed throughout the work and preview some of the crucial arguments made in the body of the dissertation. Finally, I provide a brief sketch of each chapter of the dissertation.

The Relevance of Adorno's Thinking Today

Before briefly explicating the key concepts just spelled out, I first consider the relevance of Adorno's thought today. Since the time of Adorno's writing, perhaps the world has changed to such a degree that the questions he asks and the concepts he employs and thus the insights he has are now anachronistic; even if they were an adequate response to his own world, they are no longer so, given, for example, the end of the cold-war and the increasing productivity of capitalism. Perhaps too, liberal theory has itself changed to such a degree that it is now able to capture those of his insights that are still viable. More specifically, perhaps the problems he perceives for practical reason are now irrelevant given newer theoretical approaches such as those of Rawls or Habermas, which offer a different way of connecting the intermundane experience of existing subjects with questions of the justness of societal institutions than the liberal approaches that Adorno knew. Adorno's relevance to the problem of practical reason today, then, can be challenged on both historical and theoretical grounds.

Adorno's philosophy does deal with a particular historical world. Adorno in his lectures on metaphysics, asserts that the modern world is marked by a hellish unity: torture as a permanent institution, Auschwitz, and the atom bomb. His thinking about practical reason is clearly marked by these linked historical crises: the rise of fascism and the failure of democracy,

the failure of the working class to bring about a rational society, the holocaust, and the advance of technology that makes possible weapons like the atomic bomb. So, the questioning goes, why would the insights he comes to in attempting to think philosophically about these crises be relevant today?

Obviously, we do not face these precise crises in their precise configuration. Yet, it is clear that we face similar if not the same sorts of problems. In particular, we have inherited from the world of Adorno's work the continuation of the elements of his hellish unity. Governments continue to use torture as an instrument of both domestic and foreign policy. The United States of America, for example, has clearly tortured those it has labeled “enemy combatants.” In addition, through the process of rendition, individuals are abducted and tortured in another country. Egypt, until the recent uprising and overthrow of Mubarak, tortured individuals for the United States. And, what the domestic prison system does to many inmates, while not necessarily an explicit policy, is tantamount to torture. We continue to live in the shadow of genocide. The Holocaust in particular may have marked Adorno's work, but the continuing inability for the species to avert these horrors since WWII, belies the claim that Adorno's work has nothing to say to us today. Today, nuclear weapons may have receded as an acute concern of the American public, but the fact remains that at least seven nations possess nuclear weapons. The weapons have become more powerful since Adorno's time, and the species now possesses additional weapons that are potentially just as damaging to human beings in the form of chemical and biological agents designed specifically for the purpose of causing human suffering and death. In addition to the hellish unity, politics now, as in Adorno's time has failed. While this failure has not taken the form of an explicit fascism, it is clear that western societies, at least, continue to proceed as though capitalism is the only way to organize production and other economic activity and

without real political checks on the economic system. A philosophy shaped in the face of the crises of the middle of the twentieth century, then, is certainly not irrelevant to our present day concerns.

One might still question the relevance of Adorno for thinking about contemporary societies, however, on the grounds that we now possess more sophisticated accounts of practical reason within liberal theory itself, whether that comes from the Rawlsian tradition or the critical theory tradition itself in the form of Habermas' shift to the pragmatic presuppositions of practical discourse. As I my aim at this point is merely to show the plausibility of the claim that Adorno has something to offer to contemporary thinking about practical reason, subjectivity, and politics, my intent here is neither to offer a complete account of these other theorists nor to refute them. Rather, I merely want to show some interesting contrasts between their positions and Adorno's, thus showing the potential insights that Adorno's thinking offers, but which are perhaps missing in these other accounts.

Rawls conceives of practical reason in relation to the constructivism of the political conception of justice. Practical reason, society, and persons form a conjunction through which he conceives of the capacities of agents that must be modeled in the political constructivism of justice as fairness. Practical reason in this framework comes to the two moral powers—a capacity for justice and a capacity for a conception of the good—and the holding of an actual, determinate conception of the good.[1] Now, this is clearly an ideal, and Rawls' position here is not susceptible to the claim that this ideal does not map on to actual subjects in contemporary societies. But, in response to Habermas' claim that justice as fairness is substantive, Rawls admits it is so because he cannot cede what he takes to be Habermas' claim that substantive

[1] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 103-108.

metaphysical theories are captured as formal and universal aspects of the theory of communicative action. “Justice as fairness as a political doctrine wants no part of any such comprehensive account of the form and structural presuppositions of thought and action....It aims to leave these doctrines as they are and criticizes them only insofar as they are unreasonable, politically speaking.”[2]

It is here, in the mere letting be of comprehensive doctrines that Adorno's thinking cannot abide. Again, I do not take this to be a refutation of Rawls' conception of liberalism, but rather as a brief articulation of concerns that are not comprehensible from within the theory. But, the way that Rawls draws the distinction between the metaphysical and the political leaves the questions that I seek to ask regarding experience and subjectivity out of an account of practical reason. That is, Adorno, in engaging with the question of the possibility of practical reason as a questioning of the possibility of experience at all, implicitly challenges the possibility of a politics disconnected from metaphysics. This takes the form, in the contemporary world, of turning toward the body and especially the suffering body. Suffering that is merely felt but not experienced undermines the possibility of practical reason because, without an experience of both one's own suffering and the suffering of others, reason can have no hold on us; it gets no traction. The account of Adorno's conception of experience and hence practical reason advanced here asks not only whether this account of practical reason is adequate, but also what conditions would have to hold for actual subjects to engage practically in Rawls' sense. In some sense, though, for reasons of space, I do not pursue this idea, Adorno's critique of Kant presented in chapter 3, could, with slight revision apply to aspects of Rawls' articulation of liberalism.

Habermas, too, limits the scope of practical reason in a way that leaves a place for

[2]John Rawls, “Reply to Habermas,” in *Political Liberalism*, 432.

Adorno's thinking. He states that since *The Theory of Communicative Action*, "I have considered state apparatus and economy to be systematically integrated action fields that can no longer be transformed democratically from within..." and goes on to say that the only field left for resistance lie in building "a democratic dam against" the logic of the systems of the state and capitalism's encroachment into the lifeworld.[3] In other words, it is time to stop asking whether individuals can overcome the social institutions that have taken on a life of their own beyond those individuals, and instead turn to our ability to carve out ways to live with and within them. Practical reason is still possible, its scope is just now limited to those areas of life in which democratic deliberation has a role to play. The question regarding the possibilities of practical reason are not to be put in terms of experience and subjectivity, but rather in terms of the linguistic resources necessary for reproduction of the intersubjective lifeworld.

Even in the body of the work, I don't intend to provide a complete and systematic refutation of Habermas' extensive, influential, and admittedly compelling system. Rather, my aim is to present some elements of an understanding of practical reason that may escape the sort of analysis that Habermas' discourse ethic allows. Adorno's attempts to deal with Lukács' conception of the problem of practical rationality not only develops the concepts of subjectivity, experience, and society in ways that illuminate the problem itself, but does so in ways that even his intellectual heirs seem to either miss or ignore. By the end of this project, it may turn out that the analysis I come to here is consistent with Habermas' more systematic account of the possibilities and potentials and even limits of practical reason. Yet, the interpretation of Adorno I offer would be useful nonetheless for thinking through the possibilities for both the "democratic dam" between system imperatives and the practical reason of the lifeworld, as well as the limits

[3] Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Mass., The MIT Press, 1993), 444.

of this conception of practical reason. It offers the possibility, faint as it may be, that practical reason need not be limited to the building of dams and the carving out of its own space. It can also offer the means for critique of those systems that Habermas would leave to their own logic.

The Interpretation of Adorno: Key Concepts

Near the end of Adorno's 1962 piece, "Why Still Philosophy?" he describes the following as a categorical imperative, "Philosophy...must unrestrictedly, without recourse to some mental refuge, experience: it must do exactly what is avoided by those who refuse to forsake the maxim that every philosophy must finally produce something positive."[4] In what follows, I attempt to bring philosophy to experience, and to do so in a way that is, in large part, consistent with Adorno's work. I advance an interpretation of Adorno's thinking and provide both a descriptive and normative account of the conditions relating to the creation of contemporary subjects in liberal, capitalist societies. This reflection on the conditions of subjectivity focuses on the practical activity of subjects, what some might label agency, the ability to act in relation to one's self, other selves, objects, and in relation to the very social conditions that form contemporary subjects. While the standard interpretation of Adorno, as exhibited by his heirs in the Frankfurt School, Albrecht Wellmer, Jürgen Habermas, and Axel Honneth, takes Adorno as succumbing to a paradoxical skepticism regarding reason and enlightenment and thus argues that he has nothing to offer in terms of a practical orientation to the world, the interpretation I offer of Adorno provides not only a criticism of existing societies, but also shows the sources of resistance left in the world, and in particular, in the sort of subjects which exist in liberal, capitalist societies.

To get at this conception of experience I develop the notions of self-conscious memory and imagination. The way I develop this notion of experience is actually quite close to Dewey's

[4]Theodor Adorno, "Why Still Philosophy?" in Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords, ed. and trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 17.

development of the notion of experience in *Art as Experience*. Both he and Adorno are informed by Hegelian conceptions of reality and the way in which the subject engages with reality. Memory and imagination are crucial for Adorno's framing of the problem of practical reason because engagement with the self has itself become a problem in both Adorno's historical world and our contemporary existence. The individual's suffering is no longer experienced, but merely felt. This reveals then the paucity of memory and imagination in the contemporary subject. That the subject is incapable of experiencing even its own suffering prevents both the investigation of the history of that subject and the thinking through of its possibilities. The subject becomes a cold, crystalized, parody of its own possibilities. But, I argue, there remains the objective possibility of experience. Contemporary subjects, though embattled and hemmed in by existing social structures, still possess the capacity to engage their own memory and imaginations in self-conscious ways which allow for the practical orientation to the world.

To deal with the question of the rationality of experience, I offer three ideas which, taken together, offer a way forward for thinking about experience that does not reduce the rational normative potentials which are crucial to critical theory to the conditions for discursive meaningfulness. These ideas, *orientation*, *interpretation*, and *expression*, first of all, provide a way of doing philosophy in the face of the seemingly impossibility of a practical engagement with the world, the seeming impossibility of experience. The conception of *orientation*, which consists in an openness toward the object of inquiry. Orientation is implemented by non-identity thinking, which is explicated and demonstrated in chapter 4. This is the reason for the focus on the body, and especially the suffering body. This orientation of openness allows for a particular sort of *interpretation*, which is the second key idea. The procedure of constellation brings concepts to bear around an object in such a way that the constellation can be used to interpret

some object of social reality, but in doing so, the object's particularity is not superceded by the categories used to describe it. This notion of interpretation draws on the conception of allegory put forward by Walter Benjamin and extended by Adorno in both his work of the 20s and his later work. Finally, through an adequate orientation toward the object, which allows for the constellative procedure, an interpreter can arrive at an *expression* of the meaning of a social phenomenon. The process of interpretation and the form of expression may take the form of seemingly contradictory propositions. This is the result of two factors. First, the meaningfulness of social reality cannot be reduced to its discursive form or the validity conditions for a discursive procedure. This is because there is a sense in which language itself, as an aspect of the social conditions responsible for the subject's seeming inability to experience, that is its seeming inability to engage with the world practically, partially conspires against the articulation of the very conditions that would make experience possible. Second, insofar as the constellative procedure discovers the contradictions within material reality, an expression that is adequate to the world and its interpretation, that is, that does not merely affirm what exists, may well itself take the form of seemingly contradictory propositions, which, when investigated, point at the contradictions within social reality.

These key ideas, though, also offer a way to understand the contemporary ethical subject, and hence practical reason at least in some of its particulars. By the end of chapter 3, the question of the possibility of experience is acute. Chapter 4 addresses this head on, articulating the problem as Adorno sees it through the lens of the Marxian critique of reification. But, there, I also articulate experience in the relevant sense as not only possible, but actually present, at least in moments. The three ideas developed in chapter 5 suggest a way of getting at these sorts of experience, which when made actual by a subject, allow the subject to make sense of the world,

that is, to orient themselves to the world practically. But, at the same time, it does not offer the subject a decision procedure for this orientation, interpretation, and expression; there is no absolute rule for determining the appropriateness of the expression. This seeming fault in Adorno's thinking, however, turns out to be an advantage for the following reasons. First, it allows room for the individual to connect their rudimentary experiences to the life of the species, through universal concepts such as humanity and freedom. In particular, our experience of our own bodily revulsion to human suffering can be redeemed through the conceptual resources made possible by the social evolution of the species. In this way, the notion of experience at work here does seek to keep the Kantian ideals of autonomy and a social world in which perpetual peace is possible in play. Second, the flexibility of this concept of experience allows for the interpretation of various social phenomena, but in a way that is tied to subject. All expression is the product of a subject, and it is only by being filtered through the subject's history that it can be adequately grasped. But, this continual dependence on the subject means that an interpretation must always be articulated from a standpoint, but not in such a way that one could merely dismiss the interpretation as a product of subjective bias. In other words, the linking of the rudimentary subjective experience of say, horror in the face of human suffering, must also be linked up with the actual social conditions that create the human suffering, including the social conditions that produced the very subject capable of the judgment which indicts human suffering. Hence, I focus on both memory and imagination in the process of having an experience in Adorno's sense. Third, this focus on the subjective undermines the attempt to reduce the politically or ethically relevant experience to those that can be expressed both discursively and publicly. As Adorno puts it, “Direct communicability to everyone is not a

criterion of truth."[5] In terms of experience, the validity of experience cannot be reduced either to its public understanding or its universal acceptance. But, more than this, with these notions of imagination and memory, alternate forms of expression become available as experience, for example, art, dreams, and non-linguistic behavior like touching.

The interpretation of Adorno I set forth also offers an alternative way of proceeding to contemporary modes of interpretation and criticism, even within the critical theory tradition. In chapter 4, for example, the constellative procedure reveals aspects of the genocide in Rwanda that would otherwise be lost. In particular, through the discovery of the native/settler distinction in history, one can see that the seemingly natural is in fact historical, and that it had a causal function in the genocide, and which continues to play a role in the conflicts in central Africa. Or, through Adorno's more general reflections on nationalism, one can see both several reasons why contemporary subjects almost need such delusions, and that the seemingly benign forms of nationalism that are praised even by most "progressives," are at root the nativist and racist extremes they ostensibly reject. In other words, the constellative procedure offers not only a way into experience and thus a way of understanding the contemporary subject, but also a way of understanding contemporary social phenomena which are marked by the lack of experience.

Chapter Outline

Through an examination of both Adorno's procedure of examining existing social conditions and his resulting analysis of subjectivity, my interpretative project turns to the question of the possibility of a practical orientation to the world. Through an engagement with the philosophical and social problems of Adorno's era, one can come to a procedure that offers insight into the social reproduction of subjectivity under contemporary conditions. So, while

[5]Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 41.

Adorno confronts a problem set forth by Lukács in the early 20th century, namely, the conditions for the possibility of subjects' practical engagement with a world in which social relationships have taken on the characteristics of a second nature, the procedure that Adorno advances, that of constellation, is still relevant in a world, which, if any change can be detected between then and now, is more mediated by commodities, more reified, and increasingly characterized by the advance of a crystalized second nature in which a practical orientation to the world appears nearly impossible. What Adorno is after, then, is a conception of experience in the face of the seeming elimination of its possibility.

Chapter 2 provides an interpretation of Kant vaguely consistent with Adorno's work in an attempt to at once provide context for Adorno's project and in particular set the stage for the problem of experience and the conception of subjectivity. Here I argue that the Kantian project of redeedming the conception of a self-conscious humanity that constitutes itself as a species, the ideal of perpetual peace is both useful as an ideal, yet shackled to a problematic conception of subjectivity. In particular Kant's system projects a concept of reason on to nature which boomerangs on the subject. The subject is merely contemplative in relation to the progress of the species as freedom becomes beholden to the law. The Kantian formulation and expression of this ideal is inadequate to present conditions, yet remains as regulative ideal even after the tragedies of the 20th century that continue to express themselves in our century.

Chapter 3 offers a brief summary of Adorno's attempt to overcome idealism, specifically, Kantian idealism from within the tradition itself. I demonstrate this attempt through Adorno's engagement with Kant's theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy, and political thought. The very concepts of idealism are used to demonstrate both the necessity of a materialist account of reality, but also that the self-defeating autism of transcendental idealism requires that theory take

seriously the social mediations that both make possible the transcendental approach and in the final analysis reveal the necessity of rejecting this approach in favor of an immanent critique of existing social reality. By the end of these reflections, it is clear that the problem of orienting ourselves practically is a crucial concern.

The fourth chapter brings the project into the twentieth century after a brief interlude with Hegel and Marx. There I offer the main aspects of my reinterpretation of Adorno. In the face of the historical failure of the working class as the agent of change, philosophy is forced to become interpretation. But, this is not a reduction of philosophy to hermenuetics as some in the phenomenological tradition would make it. This chapter introduces the concept of experience that is at the heart of Adorno's relevance to the present. I interpret this notion of experience through challenge posed by Lukács with regard to practical reason. In the face of this problem, Adorno offers a path opened by Benjamin, the attempt to construct constellations of concepts in order to reveal the hidden, repressed, and otherwise seemingly unavailable possibilities embedded in both our concepts themselves, but especially in the particulars that are thought to be completely described by these concepts. In other words, Adorno gives us one procedure that is not mere identity thinking. This procedure of constellation construction along with an understanding of the relationship to the suffering body, then, allows me to develop the conception of experience as a conception of self-conscious memory and imagination.

In the fifth chapter, I offer key interpretations of and objections to Adorno's way of proceeding that have held sway from the time shortly after his death to the present. Here, I introduce a conception of validity that offers a way to *orient* ourselves to the world, *interpret* that world, and finally *express* that interpretation in a way that reveals the potentials for meaning and experience in the seemingly inevitable march toward disaster. These concepts are introduced in

order to show the limits of the given interpretations of Adorno and a way to proceed once the idea of experience in Adorno's sense is taken as a plausible way to conceive of possibility of practical reason.

At the very least, in replying to the objections to Adorno's position, I show the plausibility of Adorno's approach as well as the promise of his work for advancing thought in the contemporary world. While Adorno relies on a conception of mimesis, an ability to identify with another, this ability cannot be disconnected from the self-conscious ability to engage memory and imagination. It cannot be posited as an absolute ground for a practical orientation to the world, but is always mediated conceptually. And so, the first criticism, that Adorno requires an implausible conception of mimesis, one that requires a return to nature, does not go through. The claim that Adorno undermines his own ground for thinking through a practical orientation to the world, presented in different ways by Wellmer and Habermas, assumes both that the mode of expression appropriate the contemporary world could be non-contradictory and that the potential for such an orientation could be reduced to its linguistic form. Adorno, while seemingly undermining his critique, in fact does account for language in the relevant way, as a mediating factor in the formation of subjects and indeed, even shows a tendency counter to the merely instrumental use of language, namely the expressive use of language, which can be uncovered through the turning of concepts against their claims to universality and naturalness. Finally, and connecting these themes, the conception of utopia which Adorno employs does not rely on an implausible philosophy of history, but instead attempts to redeem the inter-mundane experience of actual subjects. The notion of experience expresses precisely the necessary connection between mimesis and conceptual language.

Chapter 2 Kant, Freedom, and Progress

In the introductory chapter, I presented an outline of an interpretation of Adorno's thinking that provides for the possibility of practical reason and a conception of practical subjectivity. This interpretation seeks to conceptualize experience in such a way as to bring out both the limits and potentials of the contemporary ethical subject in western societies. In this chapter, I turn to Kant. I have three interpretative goals in this chapter. I aim to present Kant's conceptions of practical subjectivity, freedom, and progress. I argue through this interpretation that this conception of practical subjectivity and the corresponding conception of freedom, while forming a starting point for Adorno's thinking on the subject, is limited in two ways. First, since it is the result of a projection of reason on to nature it is not only questionable today in its metaphysical assumptions about nature, but also results in a limited view of the possibilities of the subject. Second, it more generally results in a conception of progress that is questionable in terms of human history since Kant's time, but also undermines Kant's own idea that the accomplishments of the species are to be brought about through its own efforts.

There are several reasons for pursuing the conception of practical subjectivity in Kant's works. Kant's work exemplifies the liberal conception of the state and the sort of actors that are supposed to exist within such a state. It is no surprise that contemporary liberal theorists in the Rawlsian tradition among others, are heavily indebted to Kant's theoretical insights. Indeed, as a classical liberal and spokesperson of the Western Enlightenment, Kant lays the theoretical foundation of the popular self-understanding of Western democracies. The main reason for confronting Kant at the outset is that the theoretical heart of my project relies on an interpretation of Adorno, who when addressing subjectivity, freedom, and progress, entwines his own theoretical apparatus with an interpretation of the Kantian system. And as a side note, the

Kantian conception of imagination, which will be dealt with further in the fourth chapter, provides genuine insights into practical subjectivity, even if he does not note these insights in his own political writings.

One of the aims of the chapter is to get clear about Kant's conception of practical subjectivity. Any conception of practical subjectivity is related to the potentials and possibilities of specific actors in a particular milieu. The most general way to conceive of these possibilities is to consider the species in relation to its own nature and the non-human natural environment in which it exists. As such, I begin with a brief explication of Kant's philosophy of history. Kant's philosophy of history is a conception of progress. This account shows three key characteristics of Kant's universal history: 1. it is a history of the species, 2. it is speculative, and 3. it is teleological. The account also presents a puzzle: nature is supposed to guarantee the *telos* of the species, the complete development of the human capacities of freedom and reason, while the goal is also supposed to be brought about through the species' own efforts. Because it offers insight into this puzzle, but also since any conception of freedom will implicate the potentials and possibilities of specific actors, I turn to the account of freedom given in the theoretical and practical philosophy. In particular, this account focuses on the third antinomy of the first *Critique* and the analytic of the second *Critique*. While this account of freedom does not solve the puzzle, it offers specific insights into the conception of subjectivity at work in Kant's oeuvre. Freedom is understood as autonomous will where the law is given by reason. More specifically, freedom is causality, not through nature, but through reason understood as determining the will on the model of a natural law. The consequences of the account of freedom Kant offers in the theoretical and practical philosophy for his conception of subjectivity emerges in the political writings. In particular, political subjects are understood as law followers, either as *homo*

economicus, who at best are free to pursue their economic interests or as citizens who are free speak and think, but not to act. There are certainly progressive aspects to Kant's conception of political subjectivity and politics: the defense of the public use of reason, the contention that international relations ought not to be ruled by what theorists today call realism, the criticism of imperialism, the idea that individual freedom is conditioned by social structures. But, the conception of subjectivity that emerges remains limited. In the end, by relying on a conception of reason as law, and thus nature as law, spontaneity is eliminated in favor of rule-following. The political subject is conceived as either a self-interested property owner and thus an identical member of the commonwealth who must follow the law as it is already constituted in the original legislation that establishes the commonwealth or, at best, an individual who may speak publicly on matters of politics. The aim of the chapter is largely explanatory. It does not aim to point out all of the problems with Kant's system, but rather it aims to show how Kant's conception of the subject is related to his philosophy of history and how the notion of the subject that emerges is limited by the fact that it depends on the projection of reason onto nature. Kant's conception of political subjectivity then eliminates the possibility of concrete solidarity and replaces it with a contemplative stance toward history. Evidence of the progress of the species comes, not from concerted political action, but rather from the enthusiasm of philosophical spectators. While Kant in some measure conceives of the constitution of political subjects socially, and as such represents an advance beyond some earlier liberal thinkers, the social is only conceived abstractly, and thus Kant's system is inadequate for theorizing adequately the development of the practical subject and its potential neutralization.

Kant's Philosophy of History

It is clear that Kant's philosophy of history is a universal history. That is, it makes claims

about the history of the species as a whole, not merely particular groups or individuals. This is what Kant means in his elucidation of the concept of universal history in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose."[6] Here, Kant explains that the aim of a universal history is to discover, "in the history of the entire species," "a steadily advancing but slow development of man's original capacities."[7] There is also the indication of additional characteristics of Kant's philosophy of history, specifically the advance of specific natural traits. This aspect will be dealt with later in the explication of the logic that Kant finds in human history. But it should be clear from this essay as well as from the first supplement of "Toward Perpetual Peace"[8] and the third section of "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice"[9] that Kant intends his philosophy of history as a universal history.

In addition to being a universal history, it is a speculative philosophy of history. It seeks to chart a trend or course of history through discovery of the guiding principles or logic of history. In the writings on history, Kant posits a logic, and this logic determines an end to which human history is oriented. It is worthwhile here to examine this goal and the logic that is supposed to determine these ends and the path to them. Most generally, Kant claims human history moves toward a state of cosmopolitan right, a state of perpetual peace in which each state is a republic, and in which the republics deal with one another in such a way as to preserve peace. The eighth proposition of the universal history essay states: "The history of the human

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[6] Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 41

[7] Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 41.

[8] Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," in *Practical Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 331-337.

[9] Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice," in *Practical Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 304-309.

race as a whole can be regarded as the realisation of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely."[10] The perfect political constitution is not republican in the contemporary sense of that term. It does not imply democracy, but rather a separation of powers between the legislature and the executive. The perfect political constitution for Kant is a constitutional monarchy with a legislature elected by property owning adult males.[11] So, at its most basic the perfect civil constitution must have a separation of powers and a representative legislative body. Having briefly explicated the goal of history, I return to the logic by which this end is achieved.

Kant's first claim in defending his account of universal history is that nature is organized in such a way that individual species must fulfill their purpose. In the first proposition of the universal history essay, Kant argues from analogy for the claim that just as we assume individual organs of animals fulfill their purpose, we must assume that the human species is destined to fulfill its purpose.[12] If we do not assume that there is *telos* in nature and with it a *telos* of humanity, we are left with "the dismal reign of chance" or with regard to humanity specifically, without the goal of the complete development of humanity's capacities, "nature...would incur the suspicion of indulging in childish play in the case of man alone."[13] Of course, the capacities that are unique to humanity, and central to the Kantian framework are reason and the freedom of the will. As such, the end that nature intends with regard to the species is one of complete

[10]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 50.

[11]See, for example, the first definitive article of perpetual peace, Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 322-325.

[12]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 42.

[13]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 43.

expression of this reason and freedom. And, as we have already seen, this end can only be achieved through certain social and political structures.

These structures and thus the ultimate end of the species living out its potential for reason and freedom, are brought about, not through reason, but through the play of natural antagonisms. Kant labels this antagonism, at its most abstract, "unsocial sociability."[14] Or, in the perpetual peace essay, the guarantee of perpetual peace is established by "the great artist nature" which lets "concord arise by means of the discord between human beings even against their will."[15] Human beings are naturally social, that is, they crave the company of others in order to develop their individual capacities. But, at the same time, they crave to be alone insofar as the company of others impedes their desire to "direct everything in accord with their own ideas."[16] Seeking status and dominance over others, which can only be established in relation to others, human beings must surround themselves with others. But, the very discord that emerges in this social condition prompts human beings to develop themselves. The complete development of natural capacities "can be fulfilled for mankind only in society."[17]

The account of how nature has designed that the perfect civil state both internally and externally is to come about follows the same general logic explained above. Through antagonism individuals and then states are brought to accord. While Kant admits in the sixth proposition of the universal history essay that the establishment of republics rather than despotic governments is the most difficult problem for humanity to solve, he once again claims that nature

[14]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 44.
[15]Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 331.
[16]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 44.
[17]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 46.

has ensured its development.[18] Two specific manifestations of the general logic of antagonism promote the ends of nature: war and commerce. While states may not develop internally as republics, external wars will make the emergence of republics more likely. For, the increasing devastation wrought by war on the people themselves, the land, as well as the monetary interests of the people will produce the conditions for the reform of despotic governments into republics. Additionally, the fact that war is not conducive to trade between nations will encourage even despotic states, "whenever war threatens to break out anywhere in the world, to prevent it by mediation, just as if they were in a permanent league for this purpose."[19]

With this short and simplified account of Kant's philosophy of history, three aspects of it are clear: 1. Kant's philosophy of history is a universal history, a history of the species. 2. It is speculative, that is, it seeks to discover a logic that operates behind the backs of the actors of history. 3. It is teleological. Through the logic of antagonism, the ultimate goal of the species, the complete development of humanity's capacities, freedom and reason, are to be achieved. And, as a consequence of these three aspects, Kant puts this philosophy of history forward as a theory of human progress. Even while wars continue and despots continue to reign, nature has ensured the development of the species by ensuring its advance toward a complete expression of human capacities. The first and third aspects of Kant's universal history are questionable today on metaphysical grounds. But, even within the terms of Kant's own systematic philosophy, the account remains puzzling.

In the third proposition of the universal history essay, Kant states, "Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical

[18]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 46-7.
[19]Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 337.

ordering of his animal existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness or perfection that that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason."[20] This presents a puzzle. Since, for example, "All wars are accordingly so many attempts (not indeed by the intention of men, but by the intention of nature) to bring about new relations of states..." will eventually bring about "a state of affairs...which like a civil commonwealth, can maintain itself *automatically,*"[21] or more generally, the account of natural antagonisms given above, there is a *guarantee* of the development of the social structures according to which human capacities are to be developed, it is unclear how exactly humanity, "through its own initiative" is involved at all in actually bringing about this ideal state. To put this simply, if nature guarantees perpetual peace and the development of human capacities, in what sense can freedom be consistently attributed to human beings? This warrants a turn to both the speculative and practical philosophy in which Kant explores the concept of freedom. There is *prima facie* evidence that the conception of freedom at work there is consistent with the account given in the political writings, for, even in the first *Critique,* Kant asserts that "A constitution providing for the greatest human freedom according to laws that permit the freedom of each to exist together with that of others...is at least a necessary idea..."(A316/B373).[22]

Freedom in the First *Critique*

The conception of freedom from the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason,*[23] requires a bit of background. Without going into the historical details of the thesis and

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[20]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 43.

[21]Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," 48.

[22]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), 397.

[23]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 484-489, 532-546.

antithesis,[24] as that would go beyond the scope of the present work, I explicate the concept of freedom that emerges from the account. First, recall what might be called Kant's dictum, that "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75).[25] Cognition can only arise from the conjunction of the understanding and the intuition, spontaneity and receptivity. The first *Critique*, in answering the skeptic, is concerned with discovering the conditions for the possibility of experience. The transcendental aesthetic gives us these conditions from the side of intuition, specifically in the transcendental unity of apperception through space and time. The transcendental deduction results in the claim "that the categories contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding"(B167).[26]

The antinomy represents the extension of reason beyond its bounds in relation to the synthesis in the understanding provided by the categories. In other words, the antinomy represents the contradictions to which transcendental realism leads. The assumption that appearances are things in themselves leads reason to contradict itself. The dynamical antinomies, the third and fourth, are resolved by showing that the claims of the thesis and antithesis are not incompatible. This contrasts with the resolution of the mathematical antinomies, in which both sides are shown to be false. Causality is the relevant category with regard to freedom. Each "side" of the debate, what Kant calls dogmatism and empiricism, offers a consistent argument for its position. The third antinomy and its resolution is supposed to

[24]See Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990) for a persuasive and detailed account of the arguments of the thesis and antithesis in the third antinomy.

[25]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 193-4.

[26]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 265.

show that the claim that there must be a first cause outside of the deterministic system of nature, "an absolute spontaneity of an action" (A448/B476)[27] and the claim that there cannot be a first cause outside the system of nature since it would make experience incoherent, are compatible. In simplest terms, the solution asks us to suppose an intelligible world, which, since it is outside of time, is also not an object of possible experience. Thus, there is the possibility of a causality of freedom. Kant calls this transcendental freedom, "the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature" (A533/B561).[28]

In the third antinomy and its solution, we are given the conditions for the possibility of the experience of morality. We have the experience that some human action "ought not to have happened," (A550/B579)[29] and one way to read the solution to this antinomy is as laying out the conditions for the possibility of this experience. And, whatever these conditions are, they cannot contradict the conditions of experience spelled out by the critique of speculative reason that the first *Critique* is mainly concerned with. The intelligible realm "would have to be **thought** in conformity with the empirical character..." (A540/B568).[30] It is helpful to note the sort of experience Kant is working from here before spelling out exactly what Kant thinks the preconditions for such experience are.

Kant gives us an example of someone stating a malicious lie as something that ought not to have happened. Now, we can go through all the possible empirical causes of this person's lie. The person had a bad upbringing, was under a particular pressure at the time, is naturally bad,

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[27]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 486.
[28]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 533.
[29]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 542.
[30]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 536.

etc. Assuming one can give all "the occasioning causes" (A554/B582)[31] there is an experience that is not accounted for: "one nonetheless blames the agent" (A555/B584).[32] We experience agents as blame-worthy, whatever the empirical conditions that lead to the action. This experience of blame is in turn conditioned by the experience that "the series of conditions that transpired might not have been..., as though with that act the agent had started a series of consequences entirely from himself" (A555/B583).[33] In other words, we experience other agents (and presumably ourselves as well) as free to act differently than they do and therefore blameworthy for whatever actions they do take.

It is this experience that provides the ground for thinking the intelligible realm in which reason is free of the determinations of empirical reality, in which "reason is determining but not determinable" (A556/B584).[34] In simplest terms, reason, in its practical use is negatively free of the sensible realm and positively, the cause (in some way that we cannot specifically conceptualize) of appearances. To be sure, the human being as *noumena* is not the cause in the sense of the empirical cause, but rather, in the sense of a causality of reason (A547/B575, A551/B579, A553/B581).[35] We must assume something like this in order to ground the experience of freedom and blame-worthiness of actors. "This blame is grounded on the law of reason, which regards reason as a cause that, regardless of all the empirical conditions just named could have and ought to have determined the conduct of the person to be other than it is"

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[31]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.
[32]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.
[33]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.
[34]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 545.
[35]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 540-541, 542-543.

(A555/B585).[36]

It should be clear that Kant's concern here is not to show that we are metaphysically free in the sense addressed in contemporary writing on free will and determinism. While this problem is present to Kant, he dismisses it as a "physiological" problem (A535/B563) and, indeed only a real problem if one assumes "the absolute reality of appearance," on which assumption the possibility of freedom is eliminated (A536/B564).[37] The solution to the fourth antinomy regarding whether there is a necessary being, as it is of the same form as the third since they are both dynamical antinomies also supports this interpretation. "Thus it has been shown only that the thoroughgoing contingency of all natural things and the all of nature's (empirical) conditions can very well coexist with the optional presupposition of a necessary, even though merely intelligible condition,..., hence they can both be true" (A562/B590).[38] In terms of contemporary writing on the problem of free will and determinism, the most that Kant can be said to be attempting is, in the words of Allen Wood, to show the compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism.[39]

The conception of freedom that emerges here is in some sense minimal. But, it still has certain characteristics that must be emphasized before I explicate Kant's conception of freedom

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[36] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.

[37] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 534-535.

[38] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 548.

[39] Allen Wood, "Kant's Compatibilism," in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Allen Wood, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 73-101. Even such an erudite thinker and sympathetic Kant interpreter as Wood, though, like so many interpreters of Kant, remains so tied to the contemporary framing of the problem of free will that his attempts to shove Kant into the categories of this debate make Kant's account seem ridiculous. One might show that Wood, in trying to make Kant's account commensurable with the contemporary debate thus posits causality according to freedom as a thing in itself, and therefore, falls prey to the exact problem Kant is attempting to avoid: transcendental realism. This goes beyond the scope of the present work, however.

in the practical writings. First we must note that freedom is a causality, not according to nature, but according to reason, for, "one can think of causality in only one of two ways: either according to nature or from freedom" (A532/B560)[40] and as was demonstrated above, ("This blame is grounded on the law of reason...), that this causality of freedom is a law of reason. Second, it must be noted that already in the first *Critique*, the spontaneity which is attributed to the understanding transcendentally, (see A548/B577 in the third antinomy and the B version of the transcendental deduction)[41] begins to be limited by the way in which Kant links the experience of freedom with the experience of morality. "Now that this reason has causality, or that we can at least represent something of the sort in it, is clear from the **imperatives** that we propose as rules to our powers of execution in everything practical" (A547/B575).[42] Kant has shifted from an experience of morality generally, "that ought not to have happened," as the reason why we must presuppose the intelligible realm in which the understanding determines itself spontaneously to a conception of morality that is a determining law. What Kant thinks we experience when we experience another individual as blameworthy and thus as someone who ought to have done otherwise—and recall this is the experience that grounds the assumption of freedom in the intelligible realm—we necessarily experience as an ought, in the sense of "the ought that reason pronounces sets a measure and goal, indeed a prohibition and authorization"(A548/B576).[43] Reason is conceived as determining its effects in analogy with the way in which a law of nature determines the individual phenomenon that it covers. Two related and important characteristics of reason emerge in the speculative philosophy: reason is a

[40]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 532.
[41]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 541 and for the B deduction, 245-266.
[42]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 540.
[43]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 541.

cause, and specifically a cause on the model of a law. Reason determines the actions of rational beings in the way that the law of gravity determines that an object will fall toward a heavier body. Freedom then comes to not being determined by nature or natural laws, and positively, reason causing an action.

The Will in the Practical Philosophy

In the practical philosophy, the will emerges as this causality of reason. Indeed even in Kant's notes to the first *Critique* he mentions the will as this aspect of reason.[44] But, before turning to an account of the will, I return to a claim made in the account of the first *Critique*'s conception of freedom. I claimed that the thinking with regard to freedom must begin with the experience of morality, for that is the experience for which Kant must search out the preconditions. In the analytic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant offers this claim again. Here, however, it is clear that the experience is an experience, not of morality in general through the experience of the blameworthiness of bad actors, but rather of the moral law. "It is therefore the moral law, of which we become immediately conscious (as soon as we draw up maxims of the will for ourselves), that *first* offers itself to us and, inasmuch as reason presents it as a determining ground not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions and indeed quite independent of them, leads directly to the concept of freedom."[45] Reason gives us the moral law as soon as we think about the principles underlying our actions. And, here, just as in the first *Critique*, Kant offers an example from experience that is supposed to show that the moral law is the only possible explanation for the experience given, and further that freedom, in the sense of a

[44]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 540. Kant comments on the phrase, "Now that this reason has causality," that "i.e., is the cause of actuality of its objects. This causality is called the will...." Kant's handwritten margin notes (E CLXXV, p. 52; 23:50).

[45]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 163.

causality outside of the sensible realm, must be supposed to make sense of the moral law. It is useful to give this example in some detail, for it shows the sort of experience Kant has in mind and Adorno finds these examples useful in advancing his critique of Kant's conception of freedom. Kant asks the reader to consider someone who claims that they have some irresistible inclination. He then asks us to imagine whether this person would continue to think this inclination irresistible if he or she were threatened directly with the gallows. He seems to think at this point the person would admit her inclination was quite resistible. He then asks us to contrast this with the same threat, that of the gallows, only in this case the person is asked to bear false witness. The person is supposed to at least hesitate to a greater degree in the case of the lie than in the case of acting on inclination. The experience of hesitation seems to be what Kant is attempting to explain the conditions for the possibility of. This hesitation is supposed to show that we do indeed have an experience of the moral law.

Indeed, this seems to be the basis of Kant's criticism of moral sense theorists in the Analytic of the second *Critique*. In this criticism, Kant claims that only way to consider someone blameworthy is to represent her as already morally good. There could be no moral sense without a prior experience of the moral law. "The concept of morality and duty would therefore have to precede any regard for this satisfaction and cannot be derived from it."[46] The idea of the moral law emerges more clearly in the second *Critique* than it did in the first as ground for the concept of freedom. "Now, however, the concept of an empirically unconditioned causality is indeed theoretically empty (without any intuition appropriate to it) but it is nevertheless possible and refers to an undermined object; in place of that, however, the concept

[46]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 171.

is given significance in the moral law and consequently in its practical reference..."[47] Without the moral law, there would be no need to assume the causality of freedom, which is the causality of reason. As Kant puts it in the preface to the second *Critique*, "the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom."[48]

I have only examined one side of the mutual dependence of the moral law and freedom. The moral law is also conditioned metaphysically by freedom. That is, "freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law....[W]ere there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves"[49] In getting clear on this point, it is worthwhile to deal now with the roll that the will plays in Kant's moral philosophy. In part III of the *Groundwork*, Kant notes, "If, therefore, freedom of the will is presupposed, morality together with its principle follows from it by mere analysis of the concept."[50] From the assumption of freedom, the assumption of the will as self determining, we get the idea of the moral law. For the will to be free, it must determine itself, and to determine itself, it must be the ability to produce effects according to rules. This is why for Kant any creature with "a will, that is, the ability to determine their causality by the representation of rules," is governed by the moral law.[51] Of course, reason, specifically in its practical aspect is the determining ground of this will, the source of the rules through which the will can be self-determining. The fact that the will is autonomous "is inseparably connected with, and indeed identical with, consciousness of freedom

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[47]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 185.
[48]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 140.
[49]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 140.
[50]Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in *Practical Philosophy,* ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 95.
[51]Kant, *Critique of Practical* Reason, 165.

of the will....”[52] The will, insofar as it is free, is autonomous. It gives itself the law according to which, in its connection to practical reason, actions ought to occur. So, freedom grounds the moral law in that the only law available without freedom, the law of nature, provides no room for an ought.

With this brief survey of the fate of freedom in Kant's speculative and practical thought in hand, I can hazard some preliminary conclusions about the fate of freedom in the Kantian system as well as the implications of this conception of freedom for practical subjectivity in Kant. Freedom, in its most minimal sense for Kant is the freedom from the causal laws of nature. Freedom understood negatively has to be understood outside of appearance and thus outside the manifold of intuition, that is, outside space and time. But, freedom must still be understood on the model of causal laws of nature. This is clear in both the first and second *Critiques*. In the first, freedom only emerges in relation to the question of whether there is a first cause outside of the system of nature. From the experience that something ought not to be, we are warranted in assuming something outside of natural causality. But the ought, and this is much clearer in the second *Critique*, is at the very least dependent on the moral law, if not the experience itself of the moral law. Freedom conceived positively is determination according to laws, not given externally by nature, but *via* the will, given by reason. Thus, Kant offers the notion of the autonomous will. The will is only free insofar as it is determined, not by nature, but by reason. But the will must be determined, at the very least on the model of the determination of particular physical events by the relevant general physical laws. As Kant's examples demonstrate, the individual agent is thus free in that they can be held morally blameworthy for their actions,

[52]Kant, *Critique of Practical* Reason, 173.

whatever the psychological or social causes of the actions.[53]

The postulates offer a way to connect these implications to Kant's philosophy of history explicated earlier. After analyzing the Stoic and Epicurean attempts to combine the concepts of virtue and happiness in the concept of the highest good, Kant comes to the conclusion that the combination virtue and happiness are not analytically related, but can only be thought synthetically. The moral will must have the highest good as its object. That is, if the highest good cannot be attained, then morality itself is not possible. In the antinomy of practical reason, Kant gives us the possibilities for combining virtue and happiness in the concept of the highest good: "either the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue or the maxim of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness."[54] Kant claims to have already shown the former impossible in the Analytic. The desire for individual happiness cannot ground morality. The second possibility is also impossible, for the only efficient cause of happiness is the ability to understand and manipulate the laws of nature for one's own ends. Kant claims the solution to this antinomy is the same as that of the antinomy of pure reason. In one sense he is right, in another wrong. In that the solution involves conceiving of an action as both intelligible and sensible, rather than taking appearances as things in themselves, the solution matches that of the first *Critique*. But, the solution here takes the side of the antithesis rather than holding out the possibility that both propositions are true when looked at from the sensible or intelligible worlds. The antithesis is correct, so long as one posits our existence as both *noumenal* and phenomenal beings. That is, if it is possible to think ourselves outside the order of nature, we can think ourselves as deserving happiness in proportion to virtue. That is, we can think of a causality that

[53]In addition to the earlier mentioned examples, see the Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason, in particular, Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 218-220.

[54]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 231.

determines happiness according to virtue.

In the Postulates, Kant conceptualizes the particulars of this causality as a sufficient cause for happiness and a system of causality that makes virtue a sufficient cause for happiness. First, the immortality of the soul must be supposed. For sensible creatures can never be completely moral. And, as morality is the first aspect of the highest good, the ability to make progress toward complete conformity with the moral law must be supposed. "Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an endless progress toward that complete conformity..."[55] This endless progress requires the continuing existence of the personality of the individual, thus, the immortality of the soul. The other aspect of this causality is the existence of God, an entity that is at least as great as its effect, namely, the proportion of happiness with morality. The immortality of the soul allows for the complete development of the person into a moral being worthy of happiness, the potential cause of happiness. God, as a being greater than the highest good, anchors the system of causality in which worthiness of happiness, complete conformity with the moral law, causes happiness.[56] The conception of the moral law, derived from the experience of morality, since it requires as its object the highest good, the doling out of happiness in proportion to virtue, also requires the postulates of God and immortality.

Kant offers a third postulate, which has already been thematized, freedom. Freedom is causality in the intelligible realm, and "is only postulated by the moral law and for the sake of

[55]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 238.

[56]This is not to say that Kant considers this a theological proof for the existence of God. Practical reason must assume God in its use.

it."[57] This captures the first side of the relationship between the moral law and freedom which was summarized earlier: the experience of the moral law grounds the assumption of freedom. The postulates taken together offer a picture of an idealized moral agent. This moral agent must be thought of as free, infinitely perfectible, and as receiving happiness in proportion to her virtue. Kant's account of the moral agent offers a goal to which the individual can proceed. There is thus a structural similarity between Kant's conception of the moral agent and his conception of the political agent. In both cases, Kant offers a *telos*, which then gives a standard to which actual agents and conditions can be compared. The system of morality and the system of politics, if they are to be feasibly thought, must suppose both ideal social conditions and ideal agency within those social conditions. An idealized agent is legitimized through a goal and its advance toward that goal. Kant's notion of a regulative principle captures this aspect of his thinking. The proposition that nature tends toward perpetual peace must be thinkable in order to preserve the duty to pursue perpetual peace. The proposition that a morally virtuous life is possible and that it will give an individual happiness must be thinkable in order to preserve the duty to follow the moral law. Ought implies can. The progressive conception of both nature and the soul's advance toward perfection keeps the duty to pursue these goals in place.

While understanding the natural progress of the species as a regulative principle does not solve the puzzle regarding freedom and nature in the political writings, it offers a reason as to why Kant thinks it is no puzzle at all. Kant's account of the natural unsocial sociability of human beings gives us reason to hope. That is, it provides the possibility that even if we assume human beings are merely creatures of inclination, that is, beings who cannot act freely, the species can advance to a condition of civil right and perpetual peace. The consequences remain troubling,

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[57]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 247.

but not in the way originally asserted in the form of the puzzle about the species being determined by nature to maximize its reason and freedom. As was noted above in the account given of the theoretical and practical philosophy, freedom is law following on the model of natural laws. Freedom comes to the autonomous will, where the law is given by reason. Kant supposes that he has captured his conception of freedom as beginning something of itself, that is freedom as spontaneity, through the idea that reason is supposed to give the law to itself. But, there is an aspect of spontaneity lost in this account. And this lack of spontaneity is a crucial characteristic of Kant's conception of practical subjectivity, for it limits the scope of action of political actors to law following, pursuit of economic self-interest, and, at best, thinking and speaking against the state. These aspects emerge clearly in the political writings, in particular, Perpetual Peace, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment,"[58] and the *Rechtslehre*[59]. While Kant attempts to defend a conception of reason and freedom that are opposed to nature (as the natural inclination to pursue self-interest at the cost of morality) his reliance on a conception of freedom that remains modeled on nature undermines this account. I will spell out these three aspects of practical subjectivity as they are presented in the political writings and then return to the puzzle regarding progress and the history of the species.

Practical Subjectivity in the Political Writings

In the *Rechtslehre*, Kant offers a three pronged view of the individual as a political subject in the civil condition. Kant addresses the political agent as a human being, as a subject, and as a citizen. In large part these three aspects of the political actor are the self-interested actor

[58] Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment," in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 11-22.

[59] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999).

of classical economics. This is especially true in how Kant conceives of the human being and the citizen, the first and third aspects. The human being is entitled to freedom, that is the pursuit of happiness in the way that she sees fit so long as it does not interfere with others' pursuit of the same. The subject is entitled to equality before the law, that is equal treatment with regard to criminal and civil law. The citizen, insofar as he is independent of others, is entitled to participate in the legislation that founds the state. I will deal with the first and third aspects first and then turn back to the second.

The first aspect of political subjectivity, that of what Kant calls the human being, is the self-interested rational actor of classical economics. Self-interest not only offers the rationale for entering a civil condition, but it is also therefore to be the state's role to protect the pursuit of self-interest in the civil condition. Since there is no right to property in the state of nature, one's possessions are constantly under threat and thus so is one's pursuit of happiness. In order to protect the right to property and thus the ability to pursue happiness people band together into a civil commonwealth. The state's role is then to protect this property and the right of people to pursue their various conceptions of the good. Here, the only sense in which the individuals are conceived as political subjects is in terms of their motivation for entering a civil state. The pursuit of one's happiness, since it does not concern the welfare of the citizenry as a whole or the welfare of the state in relation to other states, is not political. Politics is founded on self-interest and the political subject is here conceived as a rationally self-interested actor. This conception of the human being also emerges in the account of the road to a condition of international right in “Perpetual Peace,” “Universal History,” and “Theory and Practice.” In each, the citizens of republics will resist external wars because it goes against their interest in preserving and creating wealth and thus their pursuit of the good. This conception of the human being is the human

being as a being of inclination, that is, a being as an extension of nature. Since the civil condition is supposed to allow the progress of the species through its own efforts, the puzzle regarding progress emerges again.

The third aspect, the political actor as citizen, concerns the conditions for participation in the legislation through which the state is governed. Once again, property and rational self-interest form the heart of Kant's conception of the political actor. Only those individuals who are independent of need, and thus independent of nature are in a position to affect the legislative process (through voting for representatives). Kant puts this most simply in the *Rechtslehre*:

"The only qualification for being a citizen is being fit to vote. But being fit to vote presupposes the independence of someone who, as one of the people, wants to be not just a part of the commonwealth but also a member of it, that is, a part of the commonwealth acting from his own choice in community with others...."[60]

But, an individual cannot freely choose if she is dependent on others for her livelihood. She must be able to serve the commonwealth solely. To be free in this sense is to own property, even if that is only the property of a shop and a craft. If an individual has only her own labor to sell, she is not fit to vote because she is not free of natural necessity and thus cannot serve the commonwealth.

"He who has the right to vote in this legislation [the original contract—added by me] is called a citizen (*citoyen*, i.e., citizen of a state, not of a town, bourgeois). The quality requisite to this, apart from the natural one (of not being a child or a woman), is only that of *being one's own master (sui iuris)* hence having some property (and any art, craft, fine art, or science can be counted as property) that supports him—that is, if he must acquire from others in order to live, he does so only by alienating what is his and not by giving others permission to make use of his powers—and hence [the requisite quality is] that, in the strict sense of the word, he serves no one other than the commonwealth."[61]

The requirement of property ownership for political participation superficially makes sense given

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[60]Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 458.

[61]Kant, "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice," 297.

the context in which freedom and reason are contrasted with nature. That is, in the practical philosophy, we saw that freedom is conceived of outside of the determination of natural laws and thus outside of nature. But this is puzzling given that the possession of property in the state of nature depends on violence, that is, the extension of nature. In other words, the precondition for participation in the construction of the social contract, the freedom from the necessity of nature requires that one is able to use violence to keep what one has, to act like a creature of nature. In the *Rechtslehre*, Kant asks, "how far does authorization to take possession of a piece of land extend? As far as the capacity for controlling it extends, that is, as far as whoever wants to appropriate it can defend it—as if the land were to say, if you cannot protect me you cannot command me."[62] The condition for participation in the founding of the commonwealth is the ability to dominate others.

The second aspect of the individual as political agent is Kant's notion of equal subjects before the law. That is, as a subject to the law, one cannot receive special treatment because of one's social position. Here, the agent is conceived of as a law follower and the laws are conceived as universally applicable to those within the civil condition (besides the sovereign). One should note the examples that Kant offers in the practical philosophy regarding the experience of morality. The experience of morality is presented in those examples as the experience that the agent that violates the law is punishable. Kant clearly presents this conception of political subjectivity as obedience in his analysis of rebellion or revolution.

A constitution could never authorize the people to overthrow the sovereign, for that would contradict the idea of a sovereign as the ultimate arbiter. "For a people to be authorized to resist, there would have to be a public law permitting it to resist, that is, the highest legislation

[62]Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 416.

would have to contain a provision that it is not the highest and that makes the people, as subject, by one and the same judgment sovereign over him to whom it is subject. This is self-contradictory..."[63] Indeed, Kant goes even further in limiting the actions a people may take in relation to the state, eliminating even the rightfulness of sedition:

> "Therefore a people cannot offer any resistance to the legislative head of a state which would be consistent with right, since a rightful condition is possible only by submission to its general legislative will. There is, therefore, no right to sedition (*seditio*), still less to rebellion (*rebellio*), and least of all is there a right against the head of a state as an individual person (the monarch), *to attack his person* or even his life (*monarchomachismus sub specie tyrannicidii*) on the pretext that he has abused his authority (*tyrannis*)."[64]

Since the condition of right is possible only by submission and obedience to the law, there can be no organized resistance to the rightful condition in which political subjects exist. This conception of the political subject as obedient is also present in "What is Enlightenment?" Kant characterizes Frederick the Great approvingly in the following terms, "Only one ruler in the world says: 'Argue as much as you will about whatever you will, *but obey*!'"[65]

Kant does defend a certain conception of resistance to the state, and with it a conception of the ultimate freedom of subjects within the civil condition. Following the passages in which Kant rejects the *right* to rebellion, he also notes that a lack of assent on the part of the representatives of the people is healthy.

> "Nevertheless, no active resistance (by the people combining at will; to coerce the government to take a certain course of action, and so itself performing an act of executive authority) is permitted, but only *negative* resistance, that is, a refusal of the people (in parliament) to accede to every demand the government puts forth as necessary for administering the state. Indeed, if these demands were always complied with, this would be a sure sign that the people is corrupt, that its representatives can be bought, that the head of government is ruling despotically through

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[63] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals,* 463.

[64] Kant, *The Metaphysics of* Morals, 463.

[65] Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment," 18.

his minister, and that the minister himself is betraying the people."[66]

So, while collective action on the part of the people in order to coerce the government is strictly prohibited by right, there remains, as one might expect given that the hallmark of republican government for Kant is the separation of powers, the possibility of the lack of assent on the part of the people so long as it is expressed through their representatives in the legislative body. The right to hold back assent to the sovereign's wishes corresponds to the way in which Kant conceives of the public freedom to argue. That is, insofar as individuals have the freedom from nature mentioned above, they ought to be allowed to publicly express their opinions, even about the private bodies who pay them (whether government or church or army) and to which they owe their obedience as private individuals. "But insofar as this part of the machine also regards himself as a member of a whole commonwealth, even of the society of citizens of the world...he can certainly argue without thereby harming the affairs assigned him in part as a passive member."[67] Such a conception of the political subject is consistent with the principle of publicity explicated in "Perpetual Peace" as well as the duty to obey the sovereign established in the *Rechtslehre*. In both cases, it is emphasized that the individual has the right to the public use of reason, but that the individual must obey. As Kant succinctly puts it in a reply to a review by Bouterwek in the appendix of the *Rechtslehre,* "The command, 'Obey the authority that has power over you' does not inquire how it came to have this power (in order to perhaps undermine it); for the authority which already exists, under which you live, is already in possession of legislative authority, and though you can indeed reason publicly about its legislation, you cannot

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[66] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 465.

[67] Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?" 18.

set yourself up as an opposing legislator."[68] In speaking publicly, the political subject must never go so far as to suggest that the whole government itself ought to be replaced. For to do so would frustrate the end to which the maxim of such an act is oriented.[69]

One way to understand the problems of Kant's conception of practical subjectivity is by understanding Kant as trying to bridge the gap between is and ought. As we saw, Kant alternately claims that the experience of the blameworthiness of actors and the experience of the moral law itself must be explained through the critique of practical reason. But, practical reason cannot contradict the insights of the critique of pure reason, namely the claim that the world of appearances is determined according to natural laws. Kant's solution is to offer up either two worlds or two aspects through which the human being is to be understood. But, they must remain related through the concept of law. The regulative ideal of freedom grounds the ought of the moral law. The regulative ideal is how nature must be thought in order to make sense of our experiences. But, at the point at which it is merely posited in order to justify the thinkability of morality, reason is merely projected on to nature. While throughout the explication above, there is a sense in which freedom is really conceived of as nature—as a law and as dependent on domination, Kant simultaneously projects reason onto nature. Kant is asking how we can explain our experience of the moral law without contradiction. In the third antinomy, the solution revolves around the principle of non-contradiction. From a more general standpoint, the intelligible and sensible worlds must be made commensurable. The moral law itself, as well as the principle of publicity ask whether the maxim of one's actions lead to a contradiction. The law of morality and thus the rule following subject that emerges in Kant's thought as a normative

[68]Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 505-6.
[69]Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 347-350.

ideal emerges from the law of non-contradiction. The bridge between the is and the ought is to be found in this principle. Neither nature nor reason can exist as contradictory.

This explains what is happening in the puzzle presented above regarding the philosophy of history. Nature must be thought in terms commensurable with reason, and thus must contain and operate according to the same principles, in particular, at the very least, the principle of non-contradiction. Nature must be thought as leading to the ends proper to human beings in order to not contradict the experience of the moral law. Whenever Kant allows that species is capable of unity, or even collective action, it is provided only by nature, but nature conceived as an extension of reason as law-following. Take, for example, those passages in which Kant conceptualizes the legislature of the commonwealth and the checks of its members against the executive. In each case, Kant conceives of the public body as already constituted, as if by nature, which is to say, by law, which is a product of reason. In other words, it is not through the actions of individuals acting in concert that the realization of right, whether nationally or internationally, is to be achieved, but through the machinations of laws, whether those of reason or those of freedom, operating behind the backs of individuals. Kant cannot conceive of solidarity in any meaningfully active sense. In the idea of the self-interested subject, we are left with an extension of nature, the continuation of the domination present in the pre-political realm. When the political agent is conceived of as free from these sorts of inclinations, as a member of the commonwealth, we are left with the operation of the laws of freedom, reason, the moral law, all derived from the law of non-contradiction.

Before leaving this examination of Kant and his conception of the practical subject, and turning to Adorno's criticisms it is worthwhile to look at Kant's last explication of his conception of progress and the relationship of the French Revolution to this idea of progress. Kant's

conceptions of history and practical subjectivity in "The Conflict of the Faculties" confirm the findings here. In this piece, Kant searches for some experience that will ground the claim that there is some moral tendency within the human being and thus the claim that the species is progressing. This experience is not that of the participants in the French Revolution, as Kant makes clear, but the experience of the spectators of the revolution. "It is simply *the mode of thinking of the spectators* which reveals itself publicly in this game of great revolutions, and manifests such a universal yet disinterested sympathy for the players on one side against those on the other, even at the risk that this partiality could become very disadvantageous for them if discovered."[70] Because "the revolution of a gifted people...may succeed or miscarry"[71] the experience must be found at the level of thought, not at the level of mere empirical events themselves or even the experience of those participating. This experience of enthusiasm and with it the willingness to speak about this experience publicly is evidence of the moral disposition of humanity, and thus a ground for thinking that the species can progress. In a fashion similar to that in the example of the potential false witness faced with the gallows, Kant has begun with an experience and attempted to derive its preconditions. In this case the precondition of the experience of enthusiasm in the spectators of the French Revolution is conditioned by the moral disposition of human beings. And this moral disposition of human beings provides the grounds for assuming progress (at least as an ideal), but ultimately also ruling out the right of people to revolt. An experience that Kant finds "cannot be grafted onto

[70] Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. Mary Gregor and Robert Anchor (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 301-302. Emphasis mine.

[71] Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 302.

self-interest,"[72] while spontaneous in the relevant sense, is transformed in the course of the earlier political and moral writings into a basis for law, and thus spontaneity's futility. Kant attempts to avoid this consequence by claiming that the moral disposition which forms the precondition of the enthusiasm "is already itself progress insofar as its capacity is sufficient for the present."[73] But, this confirms the position spelled out above that Kant's conception of political subjectivity is largely passive, or at best, linked to political organization only through expression in speech, speech that may be uttered only if it may be uttered publicly without contradiction.

This account of Kant's conception of subjectivity and progress is crucial for the unfolding of Adorno's social theory in chapter 3. In Kant's philosophy of history and his account of the practical subject, the species is united only through a projection of reason onto nature. This is in effect an elimination of solidarity. Even at the point where Kant notes active solidarity, e.g., in the French Revolution, it is banned and replaced by the enthusiasm of the spectators. The potential in the French Revolution is turned from a fellow feeling into a contemplative stance toward history. The external possibility of freedom, insofar as it is supposed to be evidence for the possibility of progress, is reduced to an internal attitude and ultimately reason itself in the form of the moral law. It is no surprise, given the time-period of Kant's writing and his defense of liberalism and traditional morality that his system cannot conceptualize the social nature of practical subjectivity except abstractly. That is, he only conceptualizes the sociality of human beings in ideal terms as the general dependence of the progress of the species on the existence of particular social institutions, and as such cannot conceptualize solidarity. The conception of the

[72]Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 303.
[73]Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties," 302.

species at work in the philosophy of history, the entity which is supposed to progress, does so only through the movement of natural laws, which as we saw is a projection of reason onto nature. While Kant attempts to preserve the species and individuals as agents who make their own history, the overall implication of the system is to hand their fate over to laws, whether natural or rational, which operate behind the backs of agents and thus to eliminate spontaneity as a practical category. In other words, there is no space for the species to constitute itself through it's own efforts, except contemplatively, but, as Adorno argues, this constitution of the species as an entity is the precondition for progress toward the development of the individual freedom that is at the heart of Kant's politics and conception of the practical subject. I turn now to Adorno's criticisms of the Kantian system. There it becomes clear why Kant's conception of both the practical subject and progress are inadequate to contemporary conditions.

Chapter 3 Adorno's Critique of Kant's Conception of Freedom and Progress

Chapter 2 concludes that Kant's conception of practical subjectivity is limited both because it is the result of a projection of reason onto nature, and conceives of the subject in terms that are too individualistic to take account of the social factors that underlie the development of the subject both in the individual's existence and in the existence of the species. This problem becomes clear in two additional concepts, freedom and progress. In this chapter, then, I articulate elements of Adorno's thinking about practical reason as a critique of Kant's conception of freedom and progress.

The conception of freedom that emerges from the explication of Kant in chapter 2 is characterized by its inability to deal with social conditions, whether the relationship between human beings and nature or the relationships between human beings. This is a result of the insistence that freedom is reason, and reason is the following of rules. This emerges most clearly in Kant's philosophy of history, but also in his moral and political philosophy. But, as was clear in the last chapter, the problem of sociality cannot be disconnected from Kant's speculative work. In what follows, I will set the stage for the explication of Adorno's conception of ethical subjectivity as it relates to the limits of Kant's conception of freedom and history. In this context, I show the need for a theory that takes seriously the social constitution of individuality and the relationship between history and freedom in order to come to terms with subjectivity and politics in the contemporary world. Though these remarks are preliminary in that they certainly are not a complete account of Adorno's engagement with Kant, several of the threads of Adorno's criticisms of Kant will be picked up later in the work.

This chapter begins with Adorno's assessment of the Kantian speculative system as spelled out in the first *Critique* and then connects these insights to Adorno's engagement with

Kant's practical philosophy, and finally with Kant's philosophy of history. In explicating this interpretation of Kant, several key ideas from Adorno's social theory are introduced. In particular, Adorno, in interpreting Kant's speculative system, dialectically approaches some perennial problems in the history of philosophy: genesis and validity, form and matter, subject and object, and the universal and particular. Adorno's approach, by revealing the contradictions and aporias in Kant's transcendental idealism, points the way toward an historically conscious, materialist social theory; in thoroughly investigating the ahistorical, idealist, and asocial aspects of Kant's transcendental idealism, Adorno finds transcendental idealism itself provides justification for his own attempts to advance a materialist social theory that is mindful of the historical genesis and alterations of its concepts. In Adorno's analysis, this justification emerges from the necessary remainder within Kant' system. The elements which Kant cannot synthesize within his system in actually form the undergirding for the system itself.

As a starting point it is worthwhile to note that for Adorno, Kant is the culmination of the aporias of Western Enlightenment. It is through Kant's *Critiques* that the conceptual form of the problems of the Enlightenment can be viewed. In particular, Kant advances an ambiguous concept of reason and with it, a paradoxical concept of the subject. Horkheimer and Adorno represent this aspect of Kant in simple, dualistic terms in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

> "Reason as the transcendental, supraindividual self contains the idea of a free coexistence in which human beings organize themselves to form the universal subject and resolve the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. The whole represents the idea of a true universality, utopia. At the same time, however, reason is the agency of calculative thought, which arranges the world for the purposes of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than that of working on the object as mere sense material in order to make it the material of subjugation."[74]

Kant defends a reason through which both utopia and disaster are possible. The transcendental

[74] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2007), 65.

subject, as the bearer of a reason that grounds the kingdom of ends, preserves the possibility of a reconciled humanity. And as regulative ideal, as was shown in the last chapter, the possibility of utopia as perpetual peace is the social implication of this conception of the subject. At the same time, reason is the ground of science through which everything, including people, as empirical subjects, are to be investigated and controlled in order to perpetuate that which exists. These two poles of Kant's thinking are relevant then, not merely as a historical curiosity, but as the paradigm of the species failure to actualize its rational potential because of its actualization of a disparate form of rationality.

I. Adorno's Engagement with Kant's Speculative Philosophy

The dualistic approach spelled out at the beginning of the chapter is indeed too simplistic. To get a hold on the relevance of Kant's entire philosophical system to Adorno's social theory, it is crucial to begin with Kant's speculative philosophy. When Adorno interprets or explicates an earlier philosophical theory, he does so with an eye toward understanding the present state of affairs. Even in interpreting Aristotle, Adorno focuses on the problems of genesis and validity and mediation between subject and object while showing the relevance of these problems for, among other things, understanding ideology's role in present societies.[75] In advancing an interpretation of Kant, both in his lectures and his writings, Adorno takes a similar approach. In Adorno's view, one cannot understand Kant's philosophical system without understanding its historical genesis. This is not to say that Adorno reduces the question of the validity of Kant's system to a question of its historical origins. Rather, the validity and genesis of Kant's system are intertwined:

"just as it is impossible to to see the categories other than in relation to their origin and to history,

[75]Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2002).

it is equally impossible simply to *derive* concepts like space, time and the categories from history and to reduce them to social phenomenon."[76]

Adorno's explication of the Transcendental Aesthetic in his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a characteristic example of this intertwining of genesis and validity, subject and object, matter and form and as such provides an excellent way to understand both Adorno's engagement with Kant and key ideas from his social theory. In what follows, I trace Adorno's theorization about time and space as the forms of pure intuition as a critique of Kant's idealism. It is through this critique of Kant's idealism that Adorno justifies his own materialism.

In explicating Adorno's critique of Kant's idealism, it is important to stress that this is indeed a *critique* of Kant and not mere criticism. As Adorno puts it, "the challenge is not to be against idealism, but to rise above it."[77] More specifically, Adorno seeks to understand Kant by understanding the irresolvable contradictions, and in these contradictions find the truth not only about Kant's thinking, but the world in which Kant's thinking emerged and the relevance of the concepts of Kant's thought for understanding the contemporary world. In Adorno's lectures on the first *Critique* he explains that his procedure "places far greater emphasis on the ruptures, the immanent antinomies in his thinking, than upon its harmonious, synthetic form. This is because these ruptures can almost be said to constitute the Kantian philosophy, for the reason that they reveal the innermost core of his thinking."[78]

Adorno regards the first *Critique* as an attempt to defend the validity of the natural

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[76] Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2002), 168.

[77] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 136.

[78] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 178.

sciences through the analysis of the knowing subject.[79] In Kant's thinking the world of appearances must be ruled by laws or be turned over to chaos. But, in order to move beyond Hume's critique of the concepts of those natural laws, Kant must turn to the conditions for the possibility of the experience of a coherent world; the knowing subject and objective natural laws are two sides of the same coin. The thing, in its most abstract formulation then, is "the law of its possible appearances."[80] What Hume calls regularities and thus mere conventions are re-conceptualized as the laws by which the understanding operates (through the categories) on the objects of intuition. But, in order to ground the natural sciences, the experiences of the objects of knowledge of those sciences must be shown to be valid. Kant attempts to show that those experiences are valid by showing that the subjective experiences that we do have are dependent on the assumption of a unified consciousness, that the "I think" potentially accompanies all our representations. Kant's rejection of Hume's dismissal of the concept of a self then depends on the experience of the world as coherent. So, the objectivity of the natural sciences and its laws is dependent on the concept of a unified and unifying subject, a subject which must be experiencing the coherence of the world.

But since the objects of intuition are mere appearances[81], the connection with the thing in-itself is lost, or nearly so. That is, in attempting to save the laws of science from skepticism, and thus asserting the objects of experience as the objects of knowledge, Kant leaves us disconnected from the object. The assertion of the unified subject of knowledge requires the experience of the coherence of the world and thus asserts the world of appearance as the real

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[79] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 94.

[80] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 94. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 262-3. B163.

[81] See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 263. B164.

world. Notwithstanding the amorphous causal influence the thing in-itself is supposed to have over appearances, the price of the coherence of the world of experience is that it is reduced to the subjective. Adorno asserts then, that knowledge becomes merely tautology:

"We assert that all our knowledge ultimately refers to the thing in itself, since the appearances that I constitute, that I organize, are ultimately caused by the thing in itself. But since the process of cognition and its content are radically separated from this absolutely unknowable things-in-themselves by a *Χωρισμός*, a rupture, in the Platonic sense, the idea of a thing-in-itself adds nothing to my actual knowledge. This means that what I recognize as an object is just that, an object in the sense that we have all discussed at length; it is not a thing-in-itself, and always remains something constituted by a subject. Thus the problem of knowledge as a single tautology survives intact: to oversimplify grossly, it is the problem that at bottom the subject can only know itself."[82]

Adorno demonstrates this claim, that in Kant's idealism, knowledge is reduced to a tautology, that it is merely the subject coming to know the laws of its own thinking, through an interpretation of specific aspects of the first *Critique*. In particular, I will focus on his critique of the Transcendental Aesthetic. In the transcendental aesthetic, Kant attempts to establish time and space as the pure forms of intuition, that is, as the necessary preconditions of our sensibility. As such, space and time as pure forms of intuition cannot be concepts, as that would require the spontaneity of the understanding. The forms of intuition allow us to have intuitions and only then can the understanding work on actual content. Kant's own introduction to the Aesthetic claims as much(A22/B36).[83] As such this is the standard interpretation of the Aesthetic and so far uncontroversial.

Adorno, though, presents the arguments that Kant offers for the status of space and time as the pure form of intuition. And, in doing so Adorno attempts to establish that the Aesthetic is actually dependent on the Logic, that Kant attempts to "master through mere concepts all that

[82]Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 129.
[83]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 157.

cannot be mastered by concepts."[84] In what Adorno calls the third argument of the Aesthetic, Kant makes parallel arguments for the *a priori* nature of time and space. Kant argues that time and space are different from concepts in that one can remove all appearance from them and they remain, while one cannot remove time or space from appearances and be left with the appearance. With regard to space, Kant supports his claim in the following way: "One can never represent that there is no space, although one can very well think that there are no objects to be encountered in it"(A24/B38-9).[85] And with regard to time: "In regard to appearances in general, one cannot remove time, though one can very well take the appearances away from time"(A31/B46).[86] In these sections, Kant offers parallel *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in further support of the claim that time and space are non-conceptual, *a priori* conditions for the possibility of intuitions. For, if space is to inferred from experience, geometrical truths are only contingent (A24/B39).[87] And, if time is taken to be inferred from experience, the truth that different times cannot be simultaneous is similarly contingent (A31/B47).[88] Before drawing out the implications of these arguments, Adorno explains that Kant really has established that time and space are not concepts like other concepts. That is,

"Space does not relate to individual spaces like an abstract concept to the individual items of which it is composed....Now the concept of space is not formed by saying that the space of Hesse and the space of North-Rhine Westphalia and space of Schleswig-Holstein all have something in common, which is that they are a 'space'; and that the most general quality that they have in common forms the concept of 'space'. Instead—and this explains why space is a representation, a pure intuition, and not a concept—you form the general representation of space by adding together all these existing spaces so that they fit together....Obviously, the same holds good for

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[84] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 234.
[85] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 158.
[86] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 162.
[87] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 158.
[88] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 162.

time, which as a continuum is the sum of all particular instances of time and not the conceptual unity of all the different times."[89]

But, Adorno demonstrates that though Kant has shown that time and space are *a priori* and not concepts, this is one side of an antinomy that Kant does not notice. Most abstractly, Adorno asks, if space and time "are neither concepts nor intuitions, what are they?"[90] More concretely, Adorno demonstrates the problematic nature of the idea that space and time are pure forms of intuition by applying the Kantian insights from the Antinomy of Pure Reason[91] to the fourth thesis of the Transcendental Aesthetic.

The fourth thesis of the Transcendental Aesthetic claims

> Space is represented as an infinite given magnitude. Now one must, to be sure, think of every concept as a representation that is contained in an infinite set of different possible representations (as their common mark), which thus contains these under itself; but no concept, as such, can be thought as if it contained an infinite set of representations within itself. Nevertheless space is so thought (for all the parts of space, even to infinity, are simultaneous). Therefore the original representation of space is an a priori intuition, not a concept" (A25/B39-40).[92]

To this, Adorno responds that the critique of the antinomies must apply here as well. For, this part of the Transcendental Dialectic shows "the concept of an infinitude of a given magnitude" is an impossibility.[93] In other words, if one tries to imagine an infinite space, one cannot do so. One will always be left with a bounded space that is somehow supposed to represent an infinite space. On the other hand, if one tries to think of space as bounded, one can always think of a larger space. Hence the application of the resolution of the first antinomy to the problem of the

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[89] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 229-30.

[90] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 230.

[91] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 459-550.

[92] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 175. The A and B editions differ in their numbering of these theses.

[93] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 231.

aesthetic. Now Kant takes this as evidence, not that time and space as he thinks of them are unable to be thought, but merely that they are not concepts. Adorno acknowledges that Kant might claim at this point that since we are speaking of the pure forms of intuition and since the antinomy refers to concepts, the antinomy is not a problem. But, we remain in the realm of representations here. They must be thought. As such, we are left with the same problem in trying to think the forms of intuition that we have when trying to resolve the first antinomy: thought has gone beyond its limits. A form of the first antinomy reasserts itself in the aesthetic and so Adorno can show that while every content is mediated by form, that is every particular is mediated by a concept, particulars cannot be reduced to their concept without remainder. That is, unless Kant wishes to reduce all knowledge to the subject, that is, remove any semblance of an object beyond the understanding from the realm of knowledge, and thus revert to the rationalism he is attempting to overcome, he must keep alive the idea that the object has some existence independent of the subject's understanding and to which the understanding must correspond if it is to truly have knowledge *of the object.* And, indeed, Kant seems to recognize this problem when in the schematism of the concepts of the pure understanding, he attempts to show how the understanding is supposed to apply concepts to particulars non-arbitrarily. In Adorno's reading, the problem comes to how the objective is supposed to be present in knowledge that Kant has already reduced to "the space of the subjective."[94]

In the schematism of pure concepts of the understanding, Kant seeks to find "a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other, and makes possible the application of the former to the latter" (A138/B177).[95]

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[94] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 131.

[95] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 272.

Kant begins the schematism chapter "In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representations of the former must be homogeneous with the latter, i.e., the concept must contain that which is represented in the object that is to be subsumed under it, for that is just what is meant by the expression, 'an object is contained under a concept.'"[96] In dividing the concept and object so strongly into receptivity and spontaneity, Kant is left with the question as to what connects them, what makes the conceptual knowledge of objects more than a merely subjective projection on to the object. Adorno frames the problem this way:

"This requirement that there should be homogeneity, that is, resemblance between object and concept, implies that Kant is aware that the separation between these two sources of receptivity and spontaneity is somehow arbitrary. You can explain this quite simply to yourselves when you realize that for Kant an immediate given, that is, what you appear simply to receive from the outside, contains not just the forms of intuition, but also thought in a certain sense—namely synthesis: the union of disparate elements into a definite intuition. Conversely, if a concept is to be true and not just something arbitrary it must necessarily be influenced by the nature of the object to which it refers. Thanks to the total separation of spontaneity and receptivity in the architecture of the work this element of a relation between these two 'pillars of knowledge', as Kant calls them, is utterly lost sight of—whereupon Kant then tries to retrieve it."[97]

That is, rather than merely consistently defending knowledge as a tautology, Kant keeps the object of knowledge in play as well. "And in this problem what survives within the sphere of immanent consciousness that Kant has marked out for us is, after all, the idea of synthesis, the non-tautological, that is, the idea that knowledge must know more than itself; it must do more than simply reflect the form of knowledge in general."[98] Knowledge is more than identity between concept and object—more than the self-knowing subject's reflection on itself. So, Kant attempts to understand not just the subject, that is, he is not merely a rationalist, but also reflects on how form and matter, subject and object are supposed to come together. As seen above,

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[96] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 271. (A137/B176).
[97] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 132.
[98] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 130.

Adorno interprets the Schematism of pure concepts of the understanding in book II of the Transcendental Analytic as Kant's mediation of the Logic and the Aesthetic, or in Adorno's terms, as the mediation between form and content, subject and object. That is, Kant certainly is an advance beyond both the empiricist and rationalist traditions in that he at once recognizes the problem that all rationalistic knowledge is merely tautological, that is, as Adorno puts it, merely the subject's knowledge of itself, but also attempts to overcome Hume's rejection of knowledge of matters of fact that was based on the discovery that all knowledge is mediated by the subject. With Hume we are left with no way to connect our impressions with anything outside ourselves as well as no way to connect relations of ideas to matters of fact and in the Leibniz/Wolff tradition we are left with merely "laws of thought" and dogmatic assertions about the state of the world outside thought. Both traditions result in idealism. And, fundamentally, all idealism is identity thinking. Adorno shows, not that Kant's system is incoherent, but rather that Kant's system demonstrates that identity thinking is dependent on non-identity. The non-identical, the thing-in-itself is excluded from knowledge *in order to keep the system of knowledge coherent*. Knowledge as the taking of matter/content under a universal/form, is dependent on a remainder which Adorno calls the non-identical. Only by excluding the object as it is in-itself, that is outside the subject, from the realm of knowledge can Kant keep his defense of knowledge consistent.

This knowledge of the world that Kant defends is, in the end, dependent on a non-conceptual residue. And since this residue is not able to be taken under a concept, it is an example of the non-identical that forms the basis of identity thinking in which the knowledge of appearances is possible. But, this residue is not a given, some unprocessed sense data. "The supposed basic facts of consciousness are something other than mere facts of consciousness. In

the dimension of pleasure and displeasure they are invaded by a physical moment."[99] Adorno interprets Hume as the last gasp of this bodily element in epistemology. "In fact it is a last epistemological quiver of the somatic element, before that element is totally expelled. It is the somatic element's survival, in knowledge, as the unrest that makes knowledge move, the unassuaged unrest that reproduces itself in the movement of knowledge. ...The smallest trace of senseless suffering in the experienced world (*der erfahrenen Welt*) belies all the identity philosophy that would talk us out of that experience (*Erfahrung*).[100] "The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different."[101] This moment of physical aversion to suffering cannot be asserted as a mere given, as some unmediated reality which forms the ground of Adorno's materialism. The experience of the physical aversion to suffering cannot expressed outside our interaction with the world of other individuals and objects and that is why materialism must be attained to through the critique of idealism and not merely through an assertion of the truth of the natural sciences or an epistemological foundationalism that begins with some such truth. Adorno's formulation of the question of the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding is this problem of synthesis, how truth "adapts itself to to the nature of what it is classifying."[102]

In concluding his discussion of the schematism, Adorno argues that Kant's epistemology is more than a mere historical curiosity. For Kant's defense of knowledge reflects science's actual practice. Adorno's analysis of Kant's schematism of the pure concept of the understanding

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[99] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 202.

[100] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203. Translation altered. See Theodor Adorno, *Negativ Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften, B. 6*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 202-3.

[101] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203.

[102] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 131.

attempts to demonstrate that Kant, in offering over objectivity to the subject, ironically engages in an epistemological reification that is structurally similar to, and may in fact anticipate the reification that capitalist relations of production as well as the contemporary natural sciences produce in reality. Reality is shown to be the same thing as the subject. "For the sciences can be said to have achieved dominance over the world only when they renounced the attempt to gain knowledge of anything apart from what is accessible to human organization and human shaping."[103] But there is a progressive aspect to the epistemology as well. It asserts the autonomy of the subject, a subject that can freely engage with the world around it. "...human beings are the subjects of their world and not just the objects. Kant's critique of reason would not be conceivable in the absence of this idea of the social and political emancipation of the human subject that has ceased to act out of submissive role towards the world and instead has discovered in the freedom and autonomy of the subject the principle which alone enables the world to be known."[104] So, while Kant's analysis of the knowing subject represents the natural sciences' projection of subjective control on to the objects of their investigation and thus a retreat from the object itself, it also represents an implementation of the autonomy and freedom of the subject, and in fact, Adorno argues, this very projection of control is dependent on this notion of freedom. But, this implementation is itself ideological in that we are not truly masters of the world we live in. So, while we do make the world, the world is a product of the subject in the sense that there is nothing left of the world that is not mediated by human thought, labor, or language, we are for that very reason prisoners to a world that is out of our control, "we are

[103] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 135.
[104] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 135.

captives of our own selves."[105] And here is where Adorno overcomes idealism rather than merely abstractly negating it. It is in the materialist interpretation of idealist themes that the truth of the contemporary world is to be found. While we as a species control the world as we have classified it, this makes us a prisoner to both that world so classified and the more specific products of those classifications. In other words, this classificatory process is intertwined with the advance of the forces of production that results in the alienation of human beings from the very world that has become their product and thus alienation from themselves as free beings.

Adorno's engagement with Kant's conceptions of freedom and autonomy calls for a more explicit engagement with Kant's practical thought. In chapter 2, I showed that freedom becomes the projection of the rules of thought on to nature. Adorno's engagement goes further.

Adorno summarizes his analysis of the Kantian notion of will in the following. Kant's thought experiments, which are designed to show that we have an experience of morality

> "show a moment, which, as it answers to the vague experience (*Erfahrung*), may be named the addendum (*Hinzutretende*). The subject's decisions do not roll off in a causal chain; what occurs is a jolt, rather. In traditional philosophy, this factual addendum in which consciousness externalizes itself is again interpreted as nothing but consciousness....But the insistence on this was rationalistically narrowed. In that sense Kant—in keeping with his conception of practical reason as truly 'pure,' that is sovereign in relation to any material—kept clinging to the school overthrown by his criticism of theoretical reason. Consciousness, rational insight, is not simply the same thing as a free act. We cannot flatly equate it with the will. Yet this is precisely what happens in Kant's thinking."[106]

In other words, there is an experience not captured by the Kantian conception of reason. One aspect of this experience is freedom. In addition, the experience of—for lack of a better word—empathy is missing. This empathy, in particular, is not available prior to the constitution of

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[105] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 137.

[106] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 226-7. Translation altered. See Adorno, *Negativ Dialektik*, 226.

human beings as subjects. But, it is through an interpretation of the Kantian system that this non-identical, the particular, is made available to reason. The experience itself is not yet an epistemology, or an ethics, but, mediated by reason it begins to get us to the point of developing an historically conscious, materialist understanding of practical subjectivity. But a full examination of this addendum must wait until chapter 4. First, Adorno's understanding of Kant's practical philosophy must be outlined.

II. Adorno, Kant and Freedom

The linking of the transcendental subject with freedom and the empirical subject with determinism was spelled out under the category of freedom in the last chapter. To briefly summarize: In Kant's philosophical system, one task of theoretical reason is to show the possibility of freedom, that there is no contradiction between the doctrine of nature and the doctrine of freedom. "Freedom in this signification is a pure transcendental idea, which, first, contains nothing borrowed from experience, and second, the object of which also cannot be given determinately in any experience..."[107] Both the transcendental subject and the object of freedom, the moral law—to resort to the spatial metaphor that even Kant cannot avoid—lie within the *mundus intelligibilis* and thus outside the causal determinations of the world of appearance. The first section of this chapter showed that this free subject lies at the heart of the unity of the knowing subject and thus knowledge itself. But, in turning knowledge into the rules of thought, nature is turned into rules and the subject as part of nature, is turned into a function of these rules. Freedom is turned into non-freedom, a second nature. In the first section of the chapter, a brief version of Adorno's criticism of Kant's theoretical philosophy is presented. In this presentation, Kant's philosophy at once advances thought with the assertion of human

[107] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 533. (A533/B561).

autonomy, but retracts this advance even in the realm of knowledge through the reification of the subject as the projection of knowledge of the world. While the last section was forced to lean more heavily on Adorno's lectures since his writings do not usually address the theoretical component of Kant's system, the present section takes its cue from *Negative Dialectics*, in which Adorno spends a section dealing with the Kant's practical thought.

Adorno's criticism of Kant's conception of freedom begins from the commonplace criticism that his philosophical system is contradictory in that it ascribes characteristics to that which is claimed to be inaccessible to the senses. Kant vacillates between the attempt to preserve freedom by assigning it to a realm beyond appearance and the attempt to attribute freedom to actually living individuals. And, it is this vacillation that prompts and justifies Adorno's insertion of a social element into his interpretation and criticism of Kant's philosophy. As a preparation for the discussion that follows, it is worthwhile to note Adorno's characterization of his introduction of social elements into his discussion of the Kantian reflections on freedom. This mirrors Adorno's justification for bringing questions of genesis into the discussion of Kant's theoretical philosophy.

> "Such sociological reflections are not introduced into Kant's apriorism classificatorily, from the outside. The constant recurrence of terms with a social content in the *Groundwork* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* may be incompatible with the aprioristic intent, but without this kind of metabasis, the question of the moral law's compatibility with empirical man would reduce Kant to silence."[108]

In a reversal characteristic of Adorno's thought, the empirical subject and its determinations are at the heart of the transcendental subject, and the basis for this claim is to be found in Kant's own explication of his moral system. Through these determinations, not only do the problems of Kant's philosophy come to the surface, but also, one can begin to grasp the social aspect of

[108] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 257.

Adorno's thought.

If Adorno's critical engagement with Kant is accurate, social factors determine the character of the transcendental subject. This has two important implications. First, the society which surrounds the subject will, to a large degree, determine the potential for freedom for that subject. Second, if we assume, as Adorno does, that "the subject's interest in freedom will not dwindle,"[109] then a society that manifests objective unfreedom will be marked by a merely internal notion of freedom. Though Kantian thought aims at freedom, its identification with the internal will and a particular conception of rationality produces a repressive notion of freedom that corresponds to the bourgeoisie society in which it emerged. Specifically, and as was shown in the second chapter, freedom is marked by Kant's framing of the issue in terms of laws of reason.

As an aside, but to be clear, Adorno resists the claim that the base, the economy, causally determines the conceptual reflections on freedom particular to the society in which they both exist. Kant's notion of reason and freedom are reflections of the labor processes emerging at the time, "not in the sense that they have been brought forth causally by the labor process, but in the sense that, when consciousness reflects upon itself, it necessarily arrives at a concept of rationality that corresponds to the rationality of the labor process."[110] Presumably, consciousness need not reflect upon itself at all, and whether it does or not is not determined by the labor process that, even so, corresponds to the result of such reflection. For now, we can leave the relationship between the notion of rationality and the labor process to the side. Instead, what follows will focus on Adorno's claim that Kant, though rightly asking about the possibility

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[109] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 223.

[110] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 172.

of freedom, misunderstands not only the question, but his own answer. This presentation prepares the ground for a discussion of Adorno's critical engagement with Kant's reflections on Kant's philosophy of history, which is a theory of progress, as well as makes inroads into both the question of Adorno's method and the nature of the *social* aspect of Adorno's critical theory.

It is clear that Adorno thinks that Kant, in positing the transcendental subject as the ground of freedom, misunderstands his own solution to the problem of freedom and determinism. Taking seriously the positivist dismissal of the free-will determinism problem as a pseudo-problem, Adorno argues that Kant himself misses the significance of his own reflections. The positivist, and presumably in this case, Moritz Schlick's rejection of a transcendental realm[111] is absorbed by Adorno's engagement with Kant. In the first section on freedom in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno brings forth the positivist and now familiar criticism of Kantian ethics as dependent on a realm of non-existent objects. The only plausible explanation of the transcendental subject's possession of will and rationality comes from "countless moments of external—notably social—reality...; if the concept of rationality of will means anything at all, it must refer" to the invasion of "the decisions designated by the words 'will' and 'freedom'" by external social reality.[112] But, Adorno rejects the positivist dismissal of the problem as a pseudo-problem that can be resolved by defining words appropriately. While the claim about the transcendental realm's metaphysical implausibility lays the foundation for the positivist dismissal of the problem, it also leads to another possibility. The resulting inability to answer the question of whether an individual's particular action is free or determined leads Adorno to the claim that we cannot merely ask the question about an isolated empirical subject. The subject

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[111] Moritz Schlick, *Problems of Ethics,* trans. David Rynin (New York, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939).

[112] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 213.

understood merely through the lens of behaviorism does not allow us to "tell what may be predicated about freedom, or about its opposite;"[113] we must introduce a social element into any discussion of the problem. Thus, the positivists too misunderstand the problem. In addition to leaving the subject as conceived in behaviorist psychology, that is, totally isolated, their dismissal does not make sense of either our intellectual need to ask the question, nor our "naïve sense of acting arbitrarily."[114] Insofar as Kant at least begins with the experience of morality (whether of the moral law itself or the experience that someone could have acted differently), the positivist dismissal of the problem is a regression. A proper understanding of the question, then, must expand the definitions of the terms involved so that they "will include the impossibility of nailing them down, as well as the compulsion to conceive them."[115] In other words, while Kant misconceives the problem and his own solution, we cannot give up on the question nor the Kantian formulation of it. "For this interweaving of freedom and necessity and the resolution of the contradictions implicit in it is not just a problem of cognition, but the very real problem that confronts every philosophical account of so-called morality."[116]

What then is the character of this social element that must be introduced in order to make sense of the free will-determinism problem? Initially, to bring social elements into the question is to reflect on the historical nature of the question itself. The question, "Are human beings free?" is not asked in most historical epochs. Kant is aware of this fact. The concept of freedom is not always available. But, Adorno presses this claim further. It is not merely the concept of

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[113] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 213.

[114] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 213.

[115] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 212. Translation altered.

[116] Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schroder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2002), 35.

freedom that is not available in certain periods of history, but freedom itself. The question cannot emerge, because its reality is not a possibility.

> "Before the formation of the individual in the modern sense, which to Kant was a matter of course—in the sense meaning not simply the biological human being, but the one constituted as a unit by its own self-reflection, the Hegelian 'self-consciousness'—it is an anachronism to talk of freedom, whether as a reality or as a challenge."[117]

This could be considered Adorno's application of Marx's claim that "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve..."[118] to the problem of freedom. The challenge of freedom does not emerge without the possibility of its realization. And, Kant, who attempts to posit freedom outside of historical and social contingency, cannot very well conceive of it as dependent on the social and historical circumstances that affect human self-consciousness.

That Kant does not conceive of freedom historically taints his conception of it. The concept of freedom and the possibility of its realization are historically dependent on the emergence of reason, a reason that instantiates the reality principle and thus the repression of psychological drives. The external compulsion of the reality principle sets the stage for the internal compulsion of reason, which then offers the possibility of freedom.

> "Without the unity of and the compulsion of reason, nothing similar to freedom would have ever come to mind, much less come into being; this is documented in philosophy. There is no available model of freedom save one: that consciousness, as it intervenes in the total social constitution, will through that constitution intervene in the complexion of the individual. This notion is not utterly chimerical, because consciousness is a ramification of the energy of drives; it is part impulse itself, and also a moment of that which it intervenes in. If there were not that affinity which Kant so furiously denies, neither would there be the the idea of freedom, for whose sake he denies the affinity."[119]

But, reason, and thus freedom, remains tied to the psychological drives that Kant wishes to

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[117] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 218.

[118] Karl Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Early Writings*, ed. Quintin Hoare, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 426.

[119] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 265.

remove from the will and thus from freedom. In his isolation of reason from contingency in the form of the autonomous will that can only have the moral law as its object, Kant, though attempting to save freedom from the laws of nature, ignores or misses, in addition to freedom's historical contingency, the dependence of freedom on a particular organization of psychological drives. The social element, introduced here as the dependence of freedom on a particular historical constitution of reason, also includes the social organization of these psychological drives.

In fact, it is this constitution of reason and thus freedom that provides Kant with basis for the claim that "Practical freedom can be proved through experience."[120] For, he must take for granted that "we have a capacity to overcome impressions on our sensuous faculty of desire by representations of that which is useful or injurious in a more remote way."[121] Interpreting this formulation in terms of psychoanalytic theory, Adorno notes that Kant is in essence formulating the reality principle. He notes, "here we find it clearly stated that the so-called empirical proof of our freedom is provided by the fact that reason is given us as the faculty by means of which we can test reality."[122]

Here, I want to emphasize two things. First, the nature of social relationships conditions the emergence of reason. And, more specifically, the nature of the relationship between reason and the division of labor in Adorno's thought returns as a question once again. For, the division of labor, as external compulsion, seems to be the condition for the possibility of internal compulsion, and thus the emergence of freedom. Second, we begin to see why, in Adorno's

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[120]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 675. A802/B830.
[121]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 675. A802/B830.
[122]Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 87.

analysis, Kant's conception of freedom is in fact repressive. In basing the notion of freedom on the identification of reason with the will "without a remainder,"[123] not only is Kant left unable to theorize the historical and social preconditions for freedom, but, in addition, eliminates the source of resistance to society, a *consciousness* that remains partly tied to psychological drives. Later, we will see the link in Adorno between this conception of consciousness and the imagination. For now, we must examine this notion of consciousness in relation to freedom.

The essence of Adorno's critique of Kant is that freedom is, despite Kant's attempts to maintain its relationship to the universal and the necessary, a social concept: "There is no available model of freedom save one: that consciousness, as it intervenes in the total social constitution, will through that constitution intervene in the complexion of the individual." Adorno's model of freedom has the Hegelian self-consciousness making a real difference in the constitution of social reality, which in turn, makes a real difference in the constitution of that same self-consciousness. Kant's failure to understand freedom results from his inability or unwillingness to theorize the relationship between social elements and the individual consciousness, their mutual influence on one another.

To put this criticism another way, the antinomy that Kant points out with regard to freedom is in fact an internalized, idealist version of a real experience of contradiction. Not only does Kant's conception of freedom result in an internalized and idealist notion of freedom, but also, in isolating freedom and the will from the social elements that condition it, Kant eliminates the connection between practical philosophy and experience.

"The contradiction of freedom and determinism is not, as Kant's understanding of the *Critiques* would have it, a contradiction between two theoretical positions, dogmatism and skepticism; it is a contradiction in the subjects' way to experience themselves, as now free, now unfree. Under the aspect of freedom, they are unidentical with themselves because the subject is not a subject

[123] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 228.

yet—and its not yet being a subject is due precisely to its instauration as a subject. The self is what is inhuman."[124]

The contradiction is not merely a contradiction in thought, a result of reason exceeding its proper boundaries, but rather, a real experience of contradiction between the possibilities of society and its actual constitution. In eviscerating this experience and the possibility of consciousness intervening in the social constitution, Kant's notion of freedom becomes repressive. In chapter two, I established freedom as law following and thus as eliminating spontaneity. Adorno's criticism goes a step further. Freedom becomes merely "the internalized principle of society,"[125] adherence to the law, whether the law of commodity exchange or laws put forth explicitly in statute. The laws of freedom are in fact the laws of unfreedom insofar as the laws of reason only emerge from repressive social structures, in particular the commodity form and the division of labor.

III. Freedom and Philosophy of History

Adorno's insights into the Kantian notion of freedom can be applied to his speculative philosophy of history through two key assumptions: the rationally self-interested individual and the idea of a humanity fated by nature to progress toward the perfection of the species. Recall that Kant makes the first assumption in the Definitive Articles of Perpetual Peace, specifically, with regard to National Right. The first definitive article claims that republics form the basis of of an international order based on right. Because war will harm their interests in self-preservation as well as the accumulation of wealth, the citizens of republics will be loathe to endorse calls to war, and because of their ability to influence policy through legislation their interests will affect policy decisions made by the republican state. With regard to the second assumption, recall that

[124] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 299.
[125] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 241.

Kant, in the First Supplement's reflections on international right, argues that nations will act similarly to the way they would act if they belonged to an international federation oriented to the maintenance and creation of peace between nations. Because of their desire to promote international trade and war's harmful influence on trade, nations will attempt to prevent war even between other nations. This argument, however, is embedded in the teleological view of history of the First Supplement and the other writings on history. Nature has designed the species and its environment such that in acting out its self-interests, the species, even with its individuals' evil natures, conspires to bring about perpetual peace. Part 1. extends the analysis of the Kantian notion of freedom to an analysis of the constitution of subjectivity within the republic. Part 2., in part through Adorno's analysis of the notion of progress, brings this analysis to bear on the ideal of perpetual peace.

A. Freedom as Internalized Repression

The first assumption, that of the rationally self-interested citizenry of republics, warrants a return to the claim that freedom in the Kantian system becomes merely "the internalized principle of society." The individual is moral in the Kantian schema insofar as she/he acts in accordance with (and is motivated by duty to) the moral law. The moral law, in addition, is merely given by reason.

> "Consciousness of this fundamental law [of pure practical reason] may be called a fact of reason because one cannot reason it out from antecedent data of reason....However, in order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as given, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason, which, by it, announces itself as originally law giving."[126]

But, the only evidence we have for the givenness of the moral law derives from the empirical existence of obligation, the experience that individuals could act other than they did, and that

[126]Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* 164-165.

they ought to have. Recall, for example, the example of the gallows. The experience of hesitation in the question regarding the bearing of false witness is supposed to be evidence for the existence of the moral law. In other words, without the empirical fact that people do live according to certain obligations, we would have no reason to think the moral law exists at all. The only possible source of necessitation or obligation [*Nötigung*] is an empirical psychological fact. To even understand the motivation for saving freedom, for investigating morality philosophically, we must acknowledge the empirical existence of feelings of obligation; "For that there must be such a philosophy is clear of itself from the common idea of duty and of moral laws."[127] In addition, Kant is clearly at pains to demonstrate that, though respect for the moral law emerges from a feeling, that is, an empirical element, its genesis is in the moral law itself and thus does not result in an heteronomous will.

> "The consciousness of a free submission to the will of the law, yet as combined with an unavoidable constraint put on all inclinations though only by one's own reason, is respect for the law. The law that demands this respect and also inspires it is, as one sees, none other than the moral law (for no other excludes all inclinations from immediate influence on the will). An action that is objectively practical in accordance with this law, with the exclusion of every determining ground of inclination, is called duty, which because of this exclusion, contains in its concept practical necessitation [Nötigung], that is, determination to actions however reluctantly they may be done. The feeling that arises from consciousness of this necessitation [Nötigung] is not pathological, as would be a feeling produced by an object of the senses, but practical only, that is, through a preceding (objective) determination of the will and causality of reason."[128]

So, again, the existence of the moral law is in fact reliant upon empirical conditions of a certain sort, namely, the development of conscience, which, as argued above, is both an historical and social achievement. From within Kant's system, this represents a contradiction. From without, again from the standpoint of psychoanalysis, we gain a fuller explanation of the source of conscience, as well as the beginning of an understanding of Adorno's use of the notion of

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[127] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 44.

[128] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 204-5.

internalization.

The rational, self-interested individual of Kant's philosophy of history and the Kantian schema as a whole is, according to Adorno, both true and untrue. This model of the individual is true in two senses. First, this individual represents the internalized norms of society, and thus, this truly is the picture that individuals have of themselves. Second, individuals are indeed separated from society and its administration; they truly are isolated individuals only concerned with their own interests. But, this model of individuality is also false. First, it offers a model of the individual and its freedom as isolated and unencumbered by its relationship to the society in which it exists; it "tends to insulate them from the encompassing contexts and thereby strengthens their flattering confidence in the subject's autarky."[129] Second, the notion of freedom of the individual becomes merely internal; in the face of the individual's inability to change the society in which it exists, the individual—and idealism of Kant's sort is an apologia for this conception—comes to think of her freedom as a state of mind, as merely the freedom of thought or conscience.

Through Adorno's discussion of the Kantian conception of the self-interested individual, the limits of the theoretical apparatus of Kant's philosophy of history become clearer. Instead of republics merely providing a precondition for the establishment of perpetual peace, the constitution of the individual in the contemporary republic serves to legitimize the use of force and the continuance of both psychological and legal repression.

"Social stress on freedom as existent coalesces with undiminished repression, and psychologically with coercive traits. Kantian ethics, antagonistic in itself, has these traits in common with a criminological practice in which the dogmatic doctrine of free will is coupled with the urge to punish harshly, irrespective of empirical conditions. All the concepts whereby the *Critique of Practical Reason* proposes, in honor of freedom, to fill the chasm between the Imperative and mankind—law, constraint, respect, duty—all of these are repressive. A causality

[129] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 219.

produced by freedom corrupts freedom into obedience."[130]

In terms of actual individuals, the societal norms that are internalized consist in notions of duty, law, and respect. The psychological observation noted above, that we have a conscience and do act out of something like obligation is clearly true. But, Adorno notes, it is in his defense of this fact, in psychoanalytic terms, his defense of the current constitution of the super-ego, that Kant "is an authentic spokesman of bourgeois society and its discipline, above all, of the bourgeois work discipline."[131] Recall again the example from the first Critique. The experience of morality is supposed to emerge even if one can explain all "the occasioning causes" (A554/B582).[132] There is an experience that is not accounted for: "one nonetheless blames the agent" (A555/B584).[133] This is not to say that Kant is to blame for the contemporary constitution of individuality, but rather that material reality mirrors the theoretical repression of Kant's system. For, "Anyone who traces de-formation to metaphysical processes rather than the conditions of material production is a purveyor of ideologies."[134] But, at the same time, we can trace the failure of Kant's system as a plausible description of contemporary political subjectivity and the contemporary republic and thus as a plausible description of the relation between reason and politics to his metaphysical claims, which all the same, can be understood only in relation to the material reality in which they emerged.

The picture of the subject and its relation to society then begins to emerge. The experience of contradiction, while elevated into a metaphysical contradiction in Kant's notion of

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[130] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 232.
[131] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 86.
[132] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.
[133] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 544.
[134] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 284.

freedom, is real and the result of real societal contradictions. In Adorno's account of the social system and the contemporary ethical subject, he worries that this experience of contradiction is itself threatened with elimination. Through the internalization of the contradictory society's notion of subjectivity, the subject risks eliminating experience of the contradictions, to internalize a subjective notion of freedom and to rationalize the constitution of society as given. Adorno's insights begin to make sense of such wide-ranging social phenomenon as the disproportionate sentencing of criminals, the willingness to believe obviously false claims about "our enemies," and the subjective relativism encountered in public discussion of almost any kind. But, this gets ahead of the explication. In chapter four I explain these insights' relevance to understanding contemporary social phenomena.

B. Freedom, Nature, and Perpetual Peace

In Adorno's criticism of Kant, we see that the condition of freedom is, in fact, unfreedom, but, that this unfreedom, in the form of the division of labor and the internalization of the societal structure that forms the super-ego, at the same time advances the cause of repression. Through an analysis of the concept of progress, Adorno applies this insight to Kantian conception of progress. While Kant's thinking about perpetual peace constitutes an advance in so far as it formulates the notion of a reconciled humanity and puts this within our grasp as a species, it remains repressive and apologetic for the *status quo* in its static conception of nature and the projection of reason onto this concept.

Recall Kant's claim that, "What affords this guarantee [of perpetual peace] is nothing less than the great artist nature..."[135] While for Kant, we cannot know this with total certainty—that is, the claim that the species is destined for perpetual peace is not guaranteed by providence—the

[135]Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 331.

claim remains an attempt to reconcile the actual, a species that seems intent on destroying itself, with the ideal, a species that would guarantee the freedom and peaceful coexistence of all its members. Recall that the conception of nature, with rules that determine the course of the species requires the projection of reason on to nature, for, "The idea of 'design' cannot be conceived of at all except with the provision that reason is attributed to nature itself."[136] This projection of reason onto nature at once reveals humanity's domination of nature and an elimination of human determination of its own fate. Reason is projected onto nature; nature is given the *telos* to promote our highest end through the blind following of our own self-interest. As a conception of progress, the dynamic between nature and humanity is reified. Both internal and external nature are taken as a given. This becomes repressive by eliminating the elements of freedom, self-consciousness, imagination, "This is because we are dependent upon blind, organic necessities of the kind that we project onto non-human nature."[137] Time, then, is the continuing advance of unconstituted humanity's domination over nature. Progress is taken as the continuing advance of the means of control over nature. This is a one-sided view of progress. Progress also requires an advance in the species' constitution of its own social conditions.

Kant remains tied to this conception of nature and with it, the assumption that humanity is already constituted. While Kant offers us the possibility of human control over its own progress, he also settles for what exists.

"Within such enlightenment, however, which first of all puts progress toward humanity into people's own hands and thereby concretizes the idea of progress as one to be realized, lurks the conformist confirmation of what merely exists. It receives the aura of redemption after

[136] Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, ed. and trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 149.

[137] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 134-5.

redemption has failed to appear and evil has persisted undiminished."[138]

An internalized notion of freedom, that freedom is merely freedom of the internal will, is projected on to external nature, which is also posited as something beyond our control. Nature is posited as something with a will, a plan for humanity that transcends both our individual and social will. This two-sided reification is encapsulated in Adorno's claim, derived from a reading of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," that, "no progress is to be assumed that would imply that humanity in general already existed and therefore could progress."[139] Kant's idea that the conflicts between individual human beings and individual nations are merely carrying out nature's plan for the ultimate realization of the species' potential at once solidifies human conflict as natural and eliminates the potential for overcoming this conflict.

Humanity remains nature-like in its will to dominate all nature. "Absolute domination of nature is absolute submission to nature."[140] If it is truly our nature to dominate nature, then through that domination of nature, we merely succumb to our own internal nature. In other words, we do not constitute ourselves as a species capable of organizing our own relations between individuals and between the species and nature. This does not mean that Adorno advocates some return to a mythical state of nature. Quite the opposite. For, the originary dominion over nature is the prerequisite for overcoming the domination of human beings by nature, (both internal and external), that is, it forms the condition for the faculty of reason as self-reflection; it cannot develop outside of the division of labor and the internalization of society.

This is why a materialist, historically-minded, social theory is needed. Through this

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[138] Adorno, "Progress," 146.
[139] Adorno, "Progress," 145.
[140] Adorno, "Progress," 152.

analysis of the notion of progress, the underlying meaning of Kant's assumption of the rational, self-interested individual and the teleological conception of nature is revealed. The formation of the self-interested individual does carry with it the possibility of perpetual peace. But, this possibility cannot be realized within a system in which a merely internal notion of freedom is taken for freedom and in which nature itself is taken to have a rational plan for the species. Only through a self-conscious reflection upon the subject that emerges in this system, do we begin to get a picture of the contradictions that particular arrangements of society create and perpetuate. The failure of blind self-interest to create perpetual peace implies its inability to do so. In other words, something beyond self-interest and the plan of nature is required for the species to create a world in which freedom and peace are realized. An understanding of the meaning of this failure calls for social theory. In terms of Kant's philosophy of history, questions arise about the failure of humanity to constitute itself as collective humanity. In addition, we must question of the meaning of our failure as a species to recognize itself as a part of nature, a part of nature that has acquired self-consciousness through its own activity. This is to say, only a social theory that takes seriously the constitution of individuals by the social relationships which surround them, but also takes seriously the question of history and nature, the question of progress, can come to terms with the contemporary problems of practical subjectivity.

Chapter 4 The Possibility of Practical Subjectivity

Part I Introduction to Adorno, Natural-History and Norms

In Chapter 3, Adorno's normative stance emerges from the criticism of Kant's idealism. Adorno's attempt to formulate a normative position that is not idealist proceeds through a critique of idealism. Here we saw that Kant's theoretical philosophy depends on a remainder, the thing-in-itself, and the contradictions within his system point to a "non-conceptual residue," which Adorno articulates as "a physical moment." This moment, however, has implications for thinking about practical philosophy. In Kant's thought, this remainder is reduced to the freedom of the will, and in being so reduced is stripped of its spontaneity. The practical philosophy depends on a physical impulse, which is eliminated from Kant's thinking about morality.

This impulse, which Adorno associates with the body, I take as the beginnings of a normative stance which is useful, not only for understanding ethics, but especially for understanding politics. The constitution of the species as humanity, which for Adorno is the precondition of political progress presupposes this bodily revulsion to physical suffering. But, this bodily impulse is not sufficient for reinvigorating practical reason and ethical subjectivity. In addition, the physicality of the aversion to suffering must be redeemed through reflection on the emergence of universal concepts from our social evolution as a species. This social evolution and thus the evolution and status of these concepts cannot be understood outside an understanding of our and our concepts' relationship to nature. As Adorno puts it in his lecture course from 1964-5, "this interweaving of nature and history must in general be the model for every interpretive procedure in philosophy."[141]

In the last chapter, one is left with Adorno's criticisms of Kant, which, especially in

[141] Theodor Adorno, *History and Freedom*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2006), 133.

relation to Kant's practical and political thought, can be characterized as confronting Kantian themes with the social considerations that are absent from these themes. Of course, Adorno is not the first post-Kantian philosopher to do so. Considering the way in which Adorno adds social content to the abstract moral principle available from Kant's system, it is worthwhile to turn to Hegel directly, if only briefly. In so far as Kant offers up freedom from determination by mere nature in offering the categorical imperative as the determination of the principle to which maxims must align if they are to be moral, Hegel can agree. The problem arises for Hegel when one attempts to provide content, and here that means to come up with any actual principle that can be acted upon. It seems Hegel takes absolutely seriously Kant's claims that the moral law must be arrived at a priori and that the question of freedom (beyond that of its possibility in the face of the determinations of pure reason) must be left out. Thus, Hegel can claim that the injunction to act only out of duty, that is, only out of respect for the moral law, leaves one without any relationship with a world in which a contradiction could occur. Hegel goes so far as to claim that even the universalization of a maxim that endorsed murder would be acceptable without a world in which human beings were already an end.[142] Apparently, practical reason in a completely unembodied form cannot come to concrete determinations of right and wrong. Thus, Hegel can characterize the difference between morality and ethical life in the following way: "For whereas morality is the form of the will in general in its subjective aspect, ethical life is not just the subjective form and self-determination of the will: it also has its own concept, namely freedom as its content."[143]

Morality, then is freedom from nature, in that it requires the will be dictated by reason,

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[142]G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 162-3. §135.

[143]Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 186. §141.

but it is not yet affirmative freedom, as Hegel calls it. It is only in ethical life that an individual can be said to possess freedom and to come to morality. Once the individual is engaged in the life of the family, civil society, and the state, there are actually existing norms that can then be willed or not willed through the individual's actions. The injunction against murder then, as it is embodied in the state and the family, now has a determinate content, for as a member of the family, one is tied to certain goals that are inconsistent with murder. Similarly, in being tied to the ends of the state, including its own continued existence, the will murder becomes contradictory. The key point for the discussion here is that it is only in the face of particular social mediations that the individual can even become the individual that could will morally or immorally. In other words, the self-self relationship that contemporary societies largely take for granted is a product of human beings' social history. But, Hegel is going further than this. It is not only the individual's will that is in some sense subordinate to social forces, but the entirety of the individual's being as an individual. The state, as the embodiment of spirit, is the only true end. "The association of duty and right has a dual aspect, in that what the state requires as a duty should also in an immediate sense be the right of individuals, for it is nothing more than the organization of the concept of freedom. The determinations of the will of the individual acquire an objective existence through the state and it is only through the state that they attain their truth and actualization."[144] The individual is subordinate to the state, and only comes into her freedom as a member of the state, only becomes moral in light of the principles put forth for action by the state and in relation to the other members of the state. "Whether the individual exists or not is a matter of indifference to objective ethical life..."[145]

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[144] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 285. §261.

[145] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 190. §145.

Adorno can be thought of as challenging the Hegelian subordination of the individual to the totality, in Hegel's thinking just outlined, embodied in the state, but also challenging the asocial nature of Kantian morality. Kant's focus on the individual subject of morality is turned against Hegel, while Hegel's social conception of individuality is turned against Kant. Hegel is right that in order for subjectivity to even exist, certain social conditions must be in place, but is wrong in thus completely subordinating the individual subject to the status of a mere moment in the evolution of spirit. The problem, then, is that the social conditions that Hegel proposes as necessary for the realization of morality and the ethical subject are not in place, or, rather that the social conditions that Hegel describes are not the social conditions that are necessary for the realization of morality or even subjectivity, and those conditions that are necessary are not only not actual, but in danger of being eliminated from thought itself. Today, I take this as the problem of ethical subjectivity. What objective conditions must hold in order for subjects to orient themselves in the world practically? In more Kantian terms, what are the conditions for the possibility of practical reason. Thus, the problem of ethical subjectivity and practical reason, as briefly put as possible, is that the subject, in order to orient herself ethically, must exist within certain social conditions and those social conditions do not hold.

Practical Subjectivity is an Acute Problem for Adorno's Thinking

The acute problem for Adorno's thinking, then, is that, according to his own analysis of society, the social conditions necessary for the realization of subjectivity are not only not actual, but the mere possibility of their realization is in danger of being extinguished from consciousness altogether. It seems that contemporary societies mediate the relationships between subjects and themselves, subjects and other subjects, and subjects and the objective world in such a way that no non-instrumental relationship is even possible. While the problems in each particular

relationship are intricately related to one another, it's worthwhile to briefly examine some of the specific problems that arise in each of the relationships as I've laid them out. The self-self relationship is mediated by a social conception of self-preservation which turns all suffering into a means to self-preservation, makes individual suffering seem inevitable, and societies are seemingly able to reabsorb and turn into commodities all spontaneous attempts to break free from these forms of self-relation. But, even worse for the state of ethical subjectivity, it seems that the individual is so isolated by forces that are beyond the individual's control that actions and relationships cannot even rise to the level of sociality called for in the understanding of ethical subjectivity outlined above. In the Kantian terms of the last chapter, the conditions for the possibility of freedom, spontaneity, and progress cannot be realized. Similarly in relationships between two or more subjects. Something like solidarity seems impossible in a world in which all are threatened with starvation, homelessness, or worse, and in which even one's experiences of suffering are turned toward reinforcing the very social systems that are at the root of this suffering. For Adorno, even the seemingly most immediate relationships, friendship, familial and romantic love, are all in danger of becoming totally mediated by social forces that eliminate the possibility of something different. The notion of humanity necessary for progress has not, and it seems, anyway, cannot, be realized by the species. And in terms of the subject's relationship to objects, which includes external nature, everything has been turned into raw-material for our use. Particulars have become mere specimens of the general characteristics of the category under which they are placed, even where this treatment threatens our own species with extinction. So, the problem of the chapter is this question. Given Adorno's analysis of social conditions and his understanding of the conditions for the possibility of practical reason and ethical subjectivity, how is an ethical orientation to the world even possible?

How does Adorno show the continuing possibility of ethical subjectivity?

Indications of something different, of the possibilities of ethical subjectivity have to be present if Adorno's criticisms of contemporary societies is to go through. Kant's formal moral system requires a certain content, but Hegel, in his subordination of the individual to the totality of social conditions cannot provide it. In this chapter, I bring out the connections between Adorno's critique of idealism and the problem of natural history in such a way that the normative status and potentials of the bodily revulsion to suffering in Adorno's thought become clear. Adorno concludes that conceptual thought and the best of modernist art, both particular results of our emergence from nature, preserve certain possibilities for self-conscious experience of a certain sort, memory, and imagination, and thus the possibility of ethical subjectivity. Here, I will focus on philosophy, conceptual thought. In this realm, to conceive of ethical subjectivity as a continuing possibility, the connection with past suffering, including our own, cannot be severed. Reason must also acknowledge the bodily identification with the suffering of others, both human and non-human. But Adorno is no irrationalist in regarding norms being partially emergent from the body. In acknowledging the history of suffering that has been covered over by the processes of capitalist reification, reason too must be taken into account. In particular, the universal concepts that have emerged in the evolution of our social conditions, and those universals mediated by their own history in relation to particulars and other concepts must be brought into relation with the history of suffering. In this process of uncovering the natural in the historical and the historical in the natural, the potential for something different emerges from the very concepts that had been used to make the phenomenon appear natural and unchangeable, and it is in these insights that the bodily aversion to suffering has normative force. In terms of the confrontation between Hegel and Kant characterized above, Kant's formalism seems to

require a certain content, but that content is not to be provided by the Hegelian ethical life, the institutionalization of freedom and thus morality in particular ways of life, but rather by the body of the subject in its resistance to the continuing bad formalism of the very institutions that are supposed to provide content in the Hegelian system and are mediated by the forms of thought, the evolution of the universals that must be employed in understanding the world at all and which remain embedded, even in the practices of these social institutions.

Road Map of Chapter 4

The problem of ethical subjectivity will thus be confronted as the problem of the practical orientation of reason in world in which human beings are alienated from their social world. I begin hashing out a solution of sorts to this problem with a discussion of the relationship between nature and history. We can see the importance of the relationship between history and nature, society and the body, first in the views of key philosophers that span the historical gap between Kant and Adorno: Hegel, Marx, and Lukaćs. Thus, following this introduction (Chapter 4, Part I) I briefly present the understanding of nature that emerges from these figures (Chapter 4, Part II). Of course Adorno is deeply indebted to Hegel for the conception of dialectic at use in his own philosophy. But, from Hegel's thinking about nature specifically, Adorno takes up the key insight that nature, at this point in history, is always socially mediated. There is no nature that is not the product of human activity, even if merely conceptual activity. In Marx's thinking, this insight takes the specific form of the relationship between labor and nature. Marx, thus has the resources for both understanding the constitution of subjectivity after the victory of the commodity form in economic thinking, and for understanding the abstractions of Hegel's own thinking about the relationship between history and nature. Lukaćs expands this critique of capitalist thinking to the whole of capitalist societies through an analysis of the commodity form.

In addition, he offers a systematic account of the problem of norms in the world in which nature has become either the repository of the material for aesthetic contemplation or the material of scientific investigation, but where practical reason has no role to play in the understanding of the relationship between individuals and their own second nature, the givens of the social world.

Following a summary of the relevant insights from these thinkers(Chapter 4, Part II), I turn to Adorno's early talk on Natural-History(Chapter 4, Part III, Section I). It brings Lukaćs' insights into the problem of practical reason and ethical subjectivity into conversation with Benjamin's methods for attempting to solve this problem. It is Benjamin's constellative method that Adorno appropriates in order to understand the state of practical reason and ethical subjectivity in the contemporary world, and which allows him access to the non-identical of concepts, which he then uses to begin thinking through possibility of a critical reason. This takes the form of a procedure for uncovering the historical in the natural and the natural in the historical. In this section, however, the problem of the possibility of ethical subjectivity remains, though some resources for working through the problem are presented.

Thus, I turn to some preliminary thoughts about the problem of critical reason in light of these resources (Chapter 4, Part III, Section II). In this section, I spell out that Adorno is not concerned with formulating a principle of morality, but rather in working out the conditions for ethical life and locating sources of resistance to the current social structure in which ethical subjectivity seems impossible. This section highlights that Adorno's account requires a certain sort of experience if ethical subjectivity and critical reason are to remain possible. And this notion of experience is connected with suffering, self-consciousness, memory, and imagination.

Thus, in the penultimate section of the chapter (Chapter 4, Part III, Section III), I spell out the conception of experience that provides the possibility of resistance to the social system in

which ethical subjectivity, a practical orientation, seems impossible. Through Adorno's insights regarding key concepts that form a constellation with this concept of experience, I spell out the conditions for ethical subjectivity and argue that they remain alive, if only in brief moments. To move beyond the standard mode of existence in this society, bourgeois coldness as Adorno calls it, one's relationship with the world, in all three modes outlined above, must include a certain sort of self-conscious experience, which requires memory and imagination understood in particular ways and through which reification can be overcome. Following this, I show, not just that ethical subjectivity remains possible, but also the fruitfulness of Adorno's insights for thinking about the social world. In particular, I briefly reflect on the genocide in Rwanda, primarily from the standpoint of this society, but in a way that also offers insights into how to think about the situation on the ground there as well.

In the last part of the chapter (Chapter 4, Part IV), I offer concluding remarks on the practical orientation that Adorno's thinking thematizes. These reflections take the form of a summary of the objective and subjective conditions for the possibility of experience in Adorno's sense, and thus of ethical subjectivity. Following this, I begin a reflection on the validity of experience. The question of what makes a particular experience valid or rational in some sense offers a transition to some of Adorno's critics, Habermas in particular, and thus also offers a transition to chapter 5.

Part II Nature and the Problem of the Practical Subject in Hegel, Marx and Lukács

To make Adorno's conception of nature clear, it is necessary to briefly recount the conception of nature in Hegel, Marx, and Lukács' thinking. Adorno's debt to the Hegelian dialectic in general notwithstanding, there are three key ideas to take from Hegel's thought with regard to a conception of nature. First, at the heart of Hegel's epistemology is the notion that our

abstract concepts do not spring fully formed into the world, but emerge through human beings' relationships to both other human beings and to the external world. And this is true of the concept of nature as well. Nature is not a given, unmediated by human beings' relations to other human beings and their relation to external objects. This is apparent in the dialectic of the master and slave in the *Phenomenology*, where the relation between human beings is mediated by the object upon which the bondsman labors and which the master uses up. But, in the *Encyclopedia*, and this will become clear in Marx's criticisms of Hegel, nature is also conceived of as an abstract other to world spirit and progression of the absolute idea. Second, Hegel provides the insight that our sociality, our second nature, is constituted by human beings; it is not merely an inevitable extension of nature. Hegel introduces the idea of a second nature in the section on ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in the *Philosophy of Right*. There, in criticizing Kant's philosophy as reaching only to the level of abstract morality (*Moralität*), Hegel understands education as "the art of making human beings ethical: it considers them as natural beings and shows them how they can be reborn, and how their original nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature so that this spirituality becomes habitual to them."[146] Through the mediation of civil society and the family, the state becomes the embodiment of this educational function that imbues individual human beings with their second nature. Third, and crucially for Adorno, while this second nature is embodied as the constitutional arrangement of the state, it becomes a mode of the absolute and thus unchangeable. In Hegel's analysis of the state as the ultimate historical embodiment of ethical life, Hegel shows again the subordination of the individual to the collective in his system. The will of the individual becomes truly free for Hegel only in subordination to the spirit of the people, and ultimately only in subordination to the world spirit,

[146]Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 195. §151.

subordination to our self-constituted second nature. While Hegel's notion of ethical life is supposed to free the Kantian notion of freedom from its abstraction, it actually turns abstract freedom to concrete subordination to the state. Hegelian ethical life, in Marxian terms, represents the subordination of individuals to laws operating behind their backs. Still, Hegel's system does provide the basis for thinking about nature as a social category.

Marx provides an important counter to the Hegelian subordination of the individual to the whole as well as a critique of the Hegelian conception of nature. As early as 1843, in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* Marx had already reached the point of understanding Hegel's political philosophy as an inversion. That is, instead of understanding the state as the result of the workings of the family and civil society, the ideal of the state is described as if it produced the differentiations of civil society and the family. As Marx puts it, "the condition is posited as the conditioned, the determinator as the determined, the producer as the product."[147] This can be understood as one source of Adorno's criticism of Hegel's subordination of freedom to the collective.

In the 1844 Manuscripts, in his discussion of alienation (*Entfremdung*), Marx presents the results of his materialist inversion of Hegel's dialectic for thinking about nature. It is not merely human thought about the external world that comes between human beings and external nature—and Hegel at certain points of the *Phenomenology* clearly sees this— but rather, human labor. This allows Marx to emphasize—and this is crucial for understanding Adorno's claims about reconciliation with nature—that human beings come to know nature through labor upon nature, and that they themselves are a particular sort of nature: *human* nature. Interestingly, this also allows Marx to criticize idealism's conception of nature in a way that anticipates Adorno's

[147] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," in *Early Writings*, trans. Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 63.

criticisms of idealism laid out in chapter 3. For, Hegel conceives of nature abstractly, as an external nothing to be negated and overcome by thought. In Hegel's philosophy, "Nature is only the form of the idea's other-being."[148] Marx asserts instead that in order to concretely understand human beings' relationship to nature, one must begin with the insight that human beings "must remain in continuous intercourse" with nature.[149] This is not merely an accidental fact nor a mere externalization of the idea, but is part of understanding that human beings are also a species being. It is through human labor upon external nature that human beings become conscious of themselves as a species. Marx's notion of species being is also an infant form of the later notion of the universality of the interests of the working class which stands as one justification of the practical orientation of Marx's later work. In these early writings, human beings are a species being because of their universality. They are the only species that can treat itself as a species, and thus the only species that can consider nature as also part of itself. Or, rather, it is the species that can know itself as a part of nature that comes to know the rest of nature as its "inorganic body" through its own activity.[150] This conception of species being allows Marx to posit that in the relations of production in capitalism, human beings are alienated from their own species being. For, labor on nature is properly an expression of humanity's freedom, a coming to know itself as that aspect of nature that comes to know itself through its own labor. But in a system of labor that alienates the activity of working on external nature, the product of this labor from the laborer, and the laborers from one another, the condition of humanity's freedom is turned into a mere means to existence, a relation of dependence. This is

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[148]Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 125.

[149]Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 75.

[150]Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 75.

why, even in these early writings, Marx can claim that Communism "is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man..."[151] Only with the overcoming of capitalism through real control of the means of production, in particular, our own labor, can the species come into its own, can human freedom be the result of labor rather than a mere means subordinated to the goal of increasing capital. And, only then, as we saw in Adorno's criticism of Kant in chapter 3, is it possible for humanity to begin to constitute itself as a species, as humanity.

Marx is also engaged in an immanent critique of liberalism. The presuppositions of capitalism make the realization of the liberal ideals of equality, freedom, and justice impossible. Marx's process of immanent critique of liberalism can also be garnered from this discussion of nature. Above, the liberal conception of freedom is turned against the economic system through the concepts of nature and labor. But Marx also turns the liberal conception of political equality or formal equality against itself. For example, the elimination of the property requirement for political participation, in fact, presupposes the continuing existence of private property. Even in his early writings, Marx takes up the critique of idealism from within idealism. The concept of nature at work in Hegel, for Marx, shows that the system itself is a mystification, that it inverts material relations into relations between ideas. The commodity form itself instantiates a similar mystification, but in a socially effective way. This procedure of critique, of confronting existing social conditions with the way in which they undermine the conditions of their own possibility forms part of Adorno's future procedure for aligning a constellation of concepts in order to show the missed possibilities in history of concepts.

Capital is an immanent critique of bourgeois political economy. In Marx's analysis of the

[151]Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 84.

commodity form one finds his mature view of nature. Commodities consist of two opposed moments, use-value and exchange-value. Use-value is nature mediated by labor, though, not even that necessarily, e.g. water, air, soil. Use-value is also labor mediated by nature. As Marx puts it in "The Critique of the Gotha Programme," "Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use-values (and surely these are what make up material wealth!) as labour. Labour is itself only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power."[152] The commodity form, the appearance of value as an independently existing thing, is a form of alienation from ourselves as a mode of existence of nature. In the process of exchange, not only is the social character of labor covered over and replaced with the appearance of a social relation between things, but nature, as an object of human labor is covered over in a similar fashion to labor. Marx comes close to directly saying so in the contrast he establishes between labor done under the sway of commodity production and that done under a feudal system. In the feudal system, "The natural form of labour, its particularity—and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its universality—is here its immediate social form."[153] In other words, the social relations between people are not obscured by the layer of social relations that produces the fetishism of commodities. The peasant knows that she is giving 10 hours of labor to the lord per week because the peasant works directly for the lord for 10 hours per week. While in an economy dominated by the production of commodities, the labor done for oneself and that done for the capitalist is indistinguishable. And, for that matter, one's labor is indistinguishable from anyone else's labor; it has become abstract human labor. Just as particular human labor on and with particular objects becomes abstract, fungible human labor, all of nature too becomes the

[152]Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *The First International and After,* ed. David Fernbach, trans. Joris de Bres, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 341.

[153]Karl Marx, *Capital v. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 171.

abstract material upon which labor works.

Commodities, understood in their qualitative aspect, as use-values, require nature:

"Use-values like coats, linen, etc., in short, the physical bodies of commodities, are combinations of two elements, the material provided by nature, and labour. If we subtract the total amount of useful labour of different kinds which is contained in the coat, the linen, etc., a material substratum is always left. This substratum is furnished by nature without human intervention. When man engages in production, he can only proceed as nature does herself, i.e. he can only change the form of the materials. Furthermore, even in this work of modification, he is constantly helped by natural forces. Labour is therefore not the only source of material wealth, i.e. of the use-values it produces."[154]

Under the social domination of the exchange principle, it is not merely the social relations between people that are obscured and which appear as a social relation between things, but the social relation between human beings and nature becomes obscured as well. First, human beings no longer see themselves as nature. Second, nature is no longer seen as necessary for the reproduction of the species in anything but the most abstract sense. But, in obscuring both these things, the sway of the commodity form opens up a new possibility for the concept of nature: the repository of that which has been banished by the commodity form itself. In this way, the mystification of Hegel's idealist conception of nature becomes instantiated in material reality; nature is the nothing upon which anything can be written. While nature is a social category, this fact is obscured by the commodity form, which, just as it obscures the relations between human beings, also obscures the relation between human beings and the rest of nature.

Lukàcs connects the state of production with the state of reason in a way that is crucial for understanding Adorno. Lukàcs advances Marx's insight that the state of consciousness is dependent on the state and organization of our productive powers. Beginning with Marx's insight into the workings of the commodity form, Lukàcs offers a specific way to understand the state of reason under capitalism. Lukàcs shows how a certain sort of reasoning comes to be the

[154]Marx, *Capital v. 1*, 133-4.

dominant form of reason. The sort of thinking required for the exchange of commodities and more generally the functioning of advanced capitalism comes to be *the* way of thinking in an advanced capitalist society. For example, time is reduced to space through the particular form of abstraction made prevalent by the commodity form.[155]

While Lukàcs' importance in the history of Marxist thought can hardly be overemphasized, Alfred Schmidt points out one problem with Lukàcs' understanding of Marx's conception of nature. Namely, Lukàcs seems to hold that sociality of nature goes all the way down, so to speak. There is no nature outside of the social categories, which are the result of certain purposes organized by the dominant mode of production, used to describe it. "Nature is a social category. That is to say, whatever is held to be natural at any given stage of social development, however this nature is related to man and whatever form his involvement with it takes, i.e. nature's form, its content, its range and its objectivity are all socially conditioned."[156] Schmidt, referring to the just quoted passage, rightly points out that "in Marx nature is not merely a social category."[157] While nature is deeply social, it also exists as a substratum outside of human beings' labor upon it. This criticism allows Schmidt to emphasize two points. First, human beings will always have to work. The metabolism with nature is necessary to the reproduction of human life. And second, the difference between Hegel and Marx's conceptions of alienation. To overcome alienation for Hegel is to overcome objectivity as such through its eventual absorption in the World Spirit, that is, thought. While Marx highlights that even in a

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[155] Georg Lukàcs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971), 90.

[156] Georg Lukàcs, "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism," in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971), 234.

[157] Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: New Left Books, 1971), 70.

condition in which alienation has been overcome, “nature's objectivity does not simply disappear, even when it is adequate to men, but remains something external, to be appropriated.”[158] Schmidt, a student of Adorno, might be thought of as playing out Adorno's insight that subject and object, while always mediating one another, cannot be reduced to one another. Even in a state in which nature is adequate to human beings, that is, in which human labor is not alienated from human beings, external nature will remain alien in Hegel's sense. It cannot be reduced to either the thought or labor of human beings.

All the same, Lukàcs, in his earlier work, *The Theory of the Novel*, also offers the insight that nature becomes the repository of lamentations over our own alienation. It becomes in reality the abstract nothing that Marx criticizes Hegel for making it in thought, but with a twist. The concept of nature results from the projection of our relationship to our sociality, our second nature. As this relationship with second nature changes, so too does the society's understanding of nature itself. The novel is the form of art in the modern period because human beings are alienated from their society; it is characteristic of an age “in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.”[159] The historical world that produces the novel, the structures of the world in which the human being acts, is a world that, despite its being created and maintained by human beings, feels to the human beings within it as out of control, devoid of relation to the meaning of their own lives, yet determined and necessary.[160] Nature (first nature) thus becomes a repository of both the subjective and the objective: the subjective in moods, aesthetic contemplation and the objective in terms of the laws

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[158]Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, 71.

[159]Georg Lukàcs, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 56.

[160]Lukàcs, *The Theory of the Novel*, 62.

of nature. Because human beings are alienated from second nature, our social world, practical reason, reason oriented toward action cannot unify the subject and object. In Kantian terms, which Lukács is drawing on throughout this discussion, we cannot even imagine living in the kingdom of ends given that our second nature is totally out of our control. Nature becomes both the world of laws beyond our control, the laws of nature, as well as the object of our moods and tastes, the realm of aesthetic contemplation. First nature comes to mediate our relationship with second nature in such a way that it marks our alienation from our own social world. Lukács' discussion here, along with Benjamin's conception of the allegory form the bases of one of the earliest of Adorno's lectures, "The Idea of a Natural History."[161] I will begin the next section with a discussion of Adorno' conception of nature in this piece and a further analysis of Lukács and Benjamin's relationship to this piece.

Before undertaking an explication of the relevant themes from this essay and Adorno's rejection of these earlier approaches, Adorno's motivation for reorienting theory will be briefly spelled out. Adorno's attempt to move beyond Hegel, Marx, and Lukács generally, and specifically with regard to their understanding of nature can be summarized along 3 lines: first, the historical failure of the working class to realize the potentials of the species, second, the failure of culture—and this is intricately linked to both the failure of the working class and what becomes of nature in the evolution of reason and enlightenment, and third, as was spelled out in chapter 3, the failure of idealism. In the failure of each of these, a source of practical orientation and motivation dries up.

In both Marx and Lukács' understanding of history, the universality of the interests of the

[161]Theodor Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Telos* 57 (1985): 111-124. Hullot-Kentor relates that the talk was given at the Frankfurt chapter of the Kant Society on July 15, 1932.

working class are to provide the normative basis for overcoming capitalist organization of production and with it the commodification of nearly all aspects of social reality. Whether the failure of the working class to realize the emancipation of humanity can be attributed to the increasing dependence of capitalist economies on government intervention to ameliorate crises, or the increasing means of violence in the hands of the ruling class, or the repression of the working class through ideology and construction of avenues of false consciousness, or the nature of the working class itself having been oversimplified and overfilled with potentials through a lingering idealism in Marx's thought, or some combination of these and other factors, it is clear that the working class has not, as a whole, organized itself and successfully liberated itself and humanity from the control of the few or the control of the laws which emerge from production for mere exchange. We remain alienated from our second nature; the realization of the kingdom of ends seems a pipe-dream. For Adorno, this represents not just an historical failure, but also undermines the practical orientation of Marx and Lukács' approaches; it must also be understood as a theoretical failure. For example, Lukács, in applying Marx's notion of the "leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom" to the situation in 1919 and simultaneously attempting to guide action away from both voluntarism and vulgar Marxism, argues that the realm of freedom is not merely an end, "but also the means and the weapon in the struggle. And here the situation is revealed: for the first time mankind consciously takes its history into its own hands—thanks to the class consciousness of a proletariat summoned to power."[162] Adorno takes seriously that the proletariat has failed both in gaining this freedom as a means and as an end. Reflecting on the 11th thesis on Feuerbach, Adorno begins the introduction to *Negative Dialectics,* "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it

[162] Lukàcs, "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism," 250.

was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried."[163] In the face of the failure of the working class, philosophy lives on as one avenue for preserving the possibility of an alternative to what exists while the attempt to reject philosophy in favor of practice merely reproduces what exists, and in doing so is a practical dismissal of reason when reason is most needed. Lukács and Marx's emphasis on practice in the sense of the revolutionary organization of the proletariat has been eclipsed by history and this implies a new basis for theory.

In addition to the fact of historical failure of the working class to realize the potentials of humanity, Adorno is also motivated by the more recent failure of culture revealed in its extremes by the victory of fascism in Germany, and the politics in both cold-war blocs. Adorno characterizes post-war culture as instantiating a "hellish unity" composed of three related phenomena: Auschwitz, the atomic bomb, and torture as a permanent institution.[164] On the one hand, these events mark qualitative changes in experience. In particular, this hellish unity makes subjects aware that there are fates worse than death to be feared in contemporary societies: not merely the suffering and pain of torture and the camps, but the elimination of one's self before one is actually killed. In the camps, for example, survivors describe the destruction of human beings in the form of the Muselmänner.[165] As Agamben points out, "the sight of the

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[163] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3.

[164] Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, 103-104 and the final section of Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 361.

[165] See for example, Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (*If this is a Man*), trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For a contemporary recounting of the Muselmänner, see Georgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 41-86.

Muselmänner is an absolutely new phenomenon, unbearable to human eyes," but which represents the core of the camp.[166] In addition, these events mark an end to any teleological philosophy of history; no future can imbue these events with a positive meaning. Our feelings "balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate."[167] At a minimum, the hellish unity of the contemporary world makes life itself inevitably guilt-ridden. This unity makes it clear that one's life was only spared, only continues because someone else's has not. Whether causally or merely statistically, one lives because others do not live any longer.

In a way, the failure of culture is proof of the failure of idealism. Kantian and neo-Kantian ethics were largely powerless in the face of the fascism. But, more than this, as chapter 2 and 3 show, there are elements of the pathic projection of fascism within idealism itself. Idealism fails not only as metaphysics, but as ethics. It is clear that Adorno's work is always linked to an immanent critique of idealism. And insofar as this is the case, the failure of idealism also motivates Adorno's attempt to reorient theory around a self-reflective materialist dialectic. And, from the beginning, Adorno's reorientation turns to thinking about nature and history.

Part III Adorno, Experience, and Practical Subjectivity

In moving from the analysis of the commodity and the reflections on nature in Marx and Lukács to Adorno's mature understanding of the possibility of a practical orientation to the world, it is worthwhile to consider Adorno's early lecture on natural history.[168] As was mentioned in part II of this chapter, Adorno puts Lukács' formulation of the problem of natural

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[166] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, 51.
[167] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 361.
[168] Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History."

history into relation with Benjamin's notion of allegory. In doing so, Adorno moves toward a different understanding of practical reason than we find in some readings of Marx and Lukács. Instead of the universal interests of the working class, a practical orientation is generated from a dialectical reflection on nature and the evolution of universals. In particular, Adorno takes up the non-identical that emerges from idealism, the bodily impulse, while attempting to redeem, or at least keep open the possibility of the redemption of the universals that emerge in idealism. Through a critique of idealism, in particular, the conception of nature and history, the practical orientation for dialectical theory emerges from the bodily revulsion to suffering. The aim of this section is to bring out the connections between the critique of idealism in chapter 3 and the problem of natural history in such a way that the normative status and potentials of the bodily revulsion to suffering in Adorno's thought become clear.

Section I Natural-History, Constellations, and the Non-Identical

Adorno concludes that conceptual thought and the best of modernist art, partial results of our emergence from nature, preserve certain possibilities for memory, experience, imagination, and thus the possibility of ethical subjectivity. I focus on his reflections on conceptual thought. In attempting to preserve these possibilities, the connection with past suffering cannot be severed. To conceive of the possibility of a practical orientation, we must take our own suffering seriously. To do so, the bodily identification with the suffering of others, both human and non-human must also be acknowledged by reason. In acknowledging the history of suffering that has been covered over by the processes of capitalist reification, reason, in particular, the universal concepts that have emerged in the evolution of our social conditions, and those universals mediated by their own history in relation to particulars and other concepts must also be brought into dialectical relation with the history of suffering.

Adorno's presentation in the natural history essay offers a starting point. There he begins with rough concepts of both nature and history, but disclaims these definitions as to be dissolved in the course of the essay itself. Nature is "what has always been." It is "closest to the concept of myth." While, history is "the qualitatively new."[169] In disclaiming these definitions, the first part of the essay seeks to spell out several problems in the evolution of phenomenology in Scheler and Heidegger. I will only mention two points from this criticism. First, Adorno shows that the problem of history in phenomenology is resolved by turning historical being into a structure of subjective being, historicity. Thus, the project is always to take precedence over reality. Adorno thus characterizes phenomenology, or as he refers to it in its Heideggerian form, neo-ontology, as another example in the history of idealism of the reconcilliation of subject and object through a projection of subjective structures on to the world of objects. Thus, secondly, the problem of the relationship between history and nature cannot be resolved through the categories of phenomenology and we must instead attempt to read the historically new as mythical and read the given, that which is supposedly static (and which is reified in ontology) as historical, as new.

By the end of the essay, Adorno claims that the dissolution of nature and history as categories is a project of historical materialism. Implicit in his approach, then, is Marx's insight, explained above, that we are nature, come to know itself through labor upon non-human nature and through that labor, we become distinct. As we form ourselves as subjects, we form nature as objects. Initially, then, it is important to note that Adorno's notion of mimesis is not an attempt to return to a state prior to the emergence of the subject. Neither is Adorno's philosophy a return to nature or natural law. Adorno takes from Marx, not just a materialist view of history, but also the

[169] Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History," 111.

criticism of the projection of the product of peculiar social conditions into the past, for example, Marx's criticism of the Robinson Crusoe stories at the heart of bourgeois economics in which the sort of people produced by the social conditions of capitalism are taken to not only pre-exist those conditions, but form the basis for the emergence of those very conditions. In early liberalism, human beings are taken to be naturally the sort of beings that we had become in the evolution of capitalism from feudalism. And, while these state of nature stories fail as explanations and justification for current conditions, they, as explanations that are products of these very conditions, offer up insights into those conditions as they actually exist. The point is not a return to nature, but rather that insight into history is to be gained by reflection upon what the dominate mode of rationality takes to be natural. An orientation toward our second nature is to be gained through a detailed reflection upon what that second nature has turned first nature into.

The natural history essay is Adorno's earliest attempt to extend Marx's understanding of the commodity form into a method for understanding society. Like Marx, Adorno argues that one can discover the truth in the existing society through the examination of what it declares to be natural or part of nature. One discovers not only the reified nature of existing understandings of society, but also specific blind spots and problems of existing social reality and the understanding of itself that it advances in the form of reified consciousness. Adorno's extension of Marx relies on Lukács' reflections on nature in *The Theory of the Novel* and Benjamin's conception of allegory from *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel*.

Adorno explains that Lukács understands the problem that theory faces in the contemporary world. Namely, how can one make sense of a social reality that has been turned into a second nature? As one's knowledge is also a product of reified social reality, how can one

know anything different from that reality? Or in terms of the criticism of phenomenology above, and of the criticism of idealism more generally as articulated in chapter 3, how can one know reality without merely projecting the subjective on to that reality? How can one get beyond "traditional philosophy," as Adorno puts it almost 35 years later, which, "believes that it knows the unlike only by likening it to itself, while in doing so, it really knows itself only"?[170] Or as he puts it more metaphorically in the natural history essay, how can philosophy tackle this question without turning the world into "the night of indifferentiation in which all cats are grey"?[171] Is it possible to get at nature without merely reproducing the categories of subjectivity that result from our own second nature, and thus to reject everything that exists as mere reificiation? This is Adorno's early formulation of the problem I am calling the problem of ethical subjectivity, the question of whether critical reason remains possible.

Adorno thinks that Lukács very clearly articulates this problem and at least reveals a path toward overcoming it. First, he shows that second nature, our human constructs, have begun to take on the characteristics of nature, the immutable, the always has been. "The first nature, nature as a set of laws for pure cognition, nature as the bringer of comfort to pure feeling, is nothing other than the historico-philosophical objectivation of man's alienation from his own constructs."[172] As I spelled out in the last section, nature becomes either the world of laws beyond our control, the world of Kant's first *Critique* or the world of mere aesthetic contemplation. There is no place left for practical reason, for rational answers to the question "what should I do?" Second, Lukács, through the introduction of the possibility of overcoming

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[170] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 150.
[171] Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History," 122.
[172] Lukaćs, *The Theory of the Novel*, 64.

this reified state, introduces the necessity of a concept of experience. In *The Theory of the Novel*, however, Lukács actually dismisses the possibility of this sort of experience: "this second nature could only be brought to life—if this were possible—by the metaphysical act of reawakening the souls, which in an early or ideal existence created or preserved it..."[173] So, Adorno turns to Benjamin for a solution.

From Benjamin's *Ursprung*, Adorno appropriates the concept of allegory and constellation. After quoting a long passage from the *Ursrpung*, Adorno asserts that "According to Benjamin, nature, as creation, carries the mark of transience. Nature itself is transitory. Thus it includes the element of history"[174] Adorno takes this in a very specific way. The historical is an allegory, a sign for something natural, while the natural is a sign for the historical. While Benjamin may be speaking only of art here, Adorno extends this to all existence. To interpret a phenomenon, one must collect around it the appropriate concepts for unlocking this allegory and thus the signs within the natural that point to the historical and the signs within the historical that point toward the natural. But, this simplified formulation requires a caveat. As stated, this seems to indicate that merely through the constellation of the appropriate concepts, one can find nature simpliciter, the object independently of all concepts, the truly unalterable. But, this would be to merely interchange history and nature, leaving the reification of history unaltered. Rather, this way of proceeding can only be taken up within history, because the aim is "a procedure that could succeed in interpreting concrete history as nature and to make nature dialectical under the aspect of history."[175] This results of this procedure then, cannot, in contrast to phenomenology's

[173]Lukaćs, *The Theory of the Novel*, 64.
[174]Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History," 120.
[175]Adorno, "The Idea of a Natural-History," 121.

categories, be turned into the given or a structure through which we are to interpret all phenomenon. What results in this way of proceeding will always remain discontinuous; the result of the investigations cannot be anticipated as a unity as it is in Hegel, nor can it be read as a structure of Being as it is in phenomenology. To put this another way, in proceeding in this fashion, one must always begin with the particulars of a phenomenon and derive the concepts and meanings from the appearance of the natural, the contradictions from the appearance of reconciliation. This procedure forms Adorno's approach to the problem of natural history, which is actually the problem of doing philosophy at all in the face of reification. While Adorno acts out this procedure in slightly altered form throughout his life, in *Negative Dialectics*, he describes the procedure in a way that relies not on Benjamin, but instead on Max Weber's ideal type.

Weber explains his use of ideal types in the first chapter of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.[176] Weber explains that the ideal type is always related to social action. The ideal type is formulated in order to distinguish and explain the rational and irrational causes of social action. The ideal type allows the theorist to posit a form or general logic and with it project the specific path(s) social action should or would take if this form or general logic were consistently followed. In turn, the theorist can then isolate the elements outside of this general logic and the causal role they play. In Weber's example of a stock market panic, one arrives at the pure or ideal type by asking what course of action would have been taken had all irrational causes been absent. This allows the sociologist to isolate the rational and irrational causes of the stock market panic and perhaps to assign each their proper causal role in an actual situation.

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[176] Max Weber, "Basic Sociological Terms," in *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Talcott Parsons and A.M. Henderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 3-62.

Weber's attempt to define the spirit of capitalism goes some way in explaining Adorno's notion of constellation. At the outset of chapter II of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber highlights how one ought to proceed in an investigation of social objects. A concept like the 'spirit of capitalism,' "cannot be defined according to the formula *genus proximum, differentia specifica*, but it must be gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up."[177] The object of investigation, in this case the spirit of capitalism, cannot be defined, except provisionally, at the outset. Instead, the investigator must develop and clarify the concept in the course of investigation. Weber, instead of immediately defining the spirit of capitalism and then marshaling evidence and arguments for its causal significance in the rise of capitalism, begins with a merely provisional understanding of it, the exemplary writings of Benjamin Franklin.

While Weber's account of the ideal type offers insights in the relationship between concepts and objects, it remains nominalist in that ideal types are merely heuristic tools for getting at the function of a form of rationality in social action; concepts have no real content. Adorno, on the other hand, allows that the concepts do get at aspects of the object. "But as in all nominalism, however insignificant it may consider its concepts, some of the nature of the thing will come through and extend beyond the benefit to our thinking practice..."[178] Constellations of concepts, revolving around a thing and developed from ideal types, get at the meaning of an object in its social relationships. "By gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the object's interior. They attain, in thinking, what was necessarily excised

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[177] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 47.

[178] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 164.

from thinking."[179] In other words, the constellation of concepts gets at the aspects of the object that are removed from thinking when one assumes that concepts map onto the world with no remainder, that thought is a complete representation of reality, concept realism. Only through concepts is thought possible and these concepts are not merely subjective projections with no reference or influence on reality. In a way this derives from Adorno's understanding of the notion of concept (*Begriff*). Concepts are not only the universals under which particulars do or do not fall, but rather also the properties that a particular would ideally have.[180] Adorno frequently writes that particulars, in their way, strive for identity with their concepts or that they collect around themselves concepts. This metaphorical attribution of agency to objects intersects with the notions of identity thinking and non-identity thinking. Non-identity thinking, while dependent on identity thinking, negates it. One can come to know the potentials of both the universal, the concept, and with it, the potentials of the particulars that are supposed to be under that concept through the negative dialectic, which proceeds through the unearthing of the non-identical in the particular, which cannot be disconnected from its falling under a universal (in identity thinking).

Take a simple example, an object of use like a particular table, say the table at which I am now composing this and its relationship to the category table. The table is merely a sample of the kind, table. In identity thinking, all the relevant tasks of thought regarding the table are captured in the classification of this particular table as a table. And this category, its construction by human beings, is erased. It is taken to be not merely a natural kind, but taken to be so without thought of the status of categories and their relationships to particulars at all. But, Adorno is not

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[179] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 162.

[180] For a particularly clear account of the concept in Adorno see Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (New York: Columbia UP, 1978), 44-5.

concerned here with a theory of meaning; this is not merely Wittgenstein's point about categories' meaning being determined by their use in language. To pursue the non-identical, one must consider the particular table. It, like the other tables here, is constructed of three component parts: a table top, a stem, and a base. The table top is constructed from some combination of wood and plastics derived from petroleum, while the stem and base are both a heavy metal alloy. The three parts are constructed and then assembled in factories half-way around the world. One gets the picture. Our table, and each of the tables around it is mass-produced, produced for exchange, and as such has a social history. In addition, even in this location, the table has a particular history which has made it somewhat unstable and which constitutes its deviation from the category. It is no longer a very good table. By thinking through certain concepts in relation to the table, one constructs a constellation in which the non-identity of the category table and the particular table comes to light. Immediately, we see, even in its mere use, it has deviated from the concept table. It no longer adequately fulfills the function of a table of holding objects above the ground. The particular table does not live up to the concept of table. But, by thinking through the concepts of history, the division of labor, the commodity, and others, we come to see that our table is an example of a table, but also a particular table, something beyond its status as exemplar, and as such note that the category table does not do justice to the particular table either. In Hegelian terminology, we come to think concretely about the table by hashing out its relationships to its category. But, more than this, our table, like Marx's, spins grotesque thoughts out of its wooden brain.

The principle of exchange (*Tauschprinzip*) is the social form of the principle of the identity between a concept and the particulars which are to fall under it.[181] In the principle of

[181] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 146-7.

the equal exchange of goods, there is already a normative claim. Like our table's failure to live up to the concept of table, exchange in capitalist society fails to live up to the concept of equal exchange. The emergence of the table as a commodity, its production for exchange, covers over the social relationships that created the table. Among these social relationships is a particular labor relation in which surplus value is extracted from the people who, among other things, mine the ore, refine the ore, shape the refined metal into table bases and stems, attach the parts. In extracting surplus value, the principle of equal exchange is violated. But, the relationship between constant capital and variable capital, machinery and labor power, is also covered over in the process of exchange. The table's exchange value is thought to emerge from the machinery, rather than labor, which is ultimately the source of value. The labor relation is obscured and it as well as the exchange relationship between the table and money is taken as natural.

What I've demonstrated with the theoretical reflections at the beginning of the section and the example of the table is that through investigations into what is taken to be the natural, one can begin to form a constellation of concepts around objects in such a way that one can uncover the particularity of the object, as well as its existence as a concrete product of a particular organization of social labor. Adorno's procedure of investigating the natural and the historical through a constellation of concepts so that the non-identical of a particular can show itself is called for in the face of the devastation of history. Recall the 3 pronged analysis of Adorno's motivation offered at the end of Part II. The working class, culture, and idealism have failed. This is why Adorno's claim that history forces constellations on us holds.[182] But history also forces the body on us as the last remaining source of critical reason since reason itself is implicated in the destruction wrought by contemporary societies.

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[182] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*,166. "We need no epistemological critique to pursue constellations; the search for them is forced upon us by the real course of history."

Where then does bodily revulsion to suffering come into play, if, as this has been spelled out, the criticism of an existing practice seems to emerge from an immanent investigation of the natural and the historical? How does the non-conceptual in general or the body in particular get any traction in this schema? In the abstract, an answer has already been provided. In chapter 3, Adorno's procedure is played out with regard to Kant's ethical theory. To simplify, there, the bodily impulse, as both self-consciousness of our freedom and what I am calling here the bodily revulsion to suffering is discovered at the heart of Kant's attempt to justify the categorical imperative. Through the constellation of the concepts of Kant's own ethics, the non-identical, that which Kant attempts to and must eliminate in making his system consistent, is shown to be the actual basis of the system. The system cannot be kept consistent without eliminating the non-identical, in this case, the body and its impulses. But, at the same time, nothing can justify the "facts of reason," but these very impulses. So, in Kant and in idealism generally, the non-identical is covered over. But, this insight must be applied clearly to existing social reality. For, Adorno is advancing this procedure not merely as a philosophical critique of idealism, but as a critique of existing social reality. Social reality itself has become obscured by the categories used to understand it. Social reality has been reified, but the only way to get beyond this is through those reified categories. In the face of that critique, it is difficult to formulate any notion of ethical subjectivity that does not turn into the night in which all cats are grey, and thus one in which criticism itself is not possible.

Section II Transition to Experience: Initial thoughts on the Possibility of a Practical Orientation

In one of the moments where Adorno advances what seems to be a moral principle that is supposed to offer a way to distinguish the moral from the immoral, he orients morality around

the Holocaust:

> "A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen. When we want to find reasons for it, this imperative is as refractory as the given one of Kant was once upon a time. Dealing discursively with it would be an outrage, for the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum—bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed even with individuality about to vanish as a form of mental reflection. It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives."[183]

In particular, it is clear from this passage that Adorno connects morality with his critique of Kant. The implication of this critique for thinking about morality after the Holocaust is that morality cannot be based on reason alone, at least reason as it has come to be understood. The bodily impulse has a place in understanding thought, human freedom, and the normative claim that human suffering is to be avoided. But, this is not a decision procedure for determining what thoughts and actions we should take. For, just as with Kant's categorical imperative, it would prove useless, not only in adjudicating moral controversy, but even in determining whether morality comes into play in a particular situation. Instead, Adorno puts forward a quasi-transcendental claim that the only source of a practical orientation yet to be emptied of its force is to be found in the body. This is why he claims that history has forced materialism on metaphysics. But, more than this, the extra-rational basis of thought itself is the body in its impulse to identify with the suffering of others.

The link between this bodily revulsion to suffering and the universal concept and thus the key ideas for understanding ethical subjectivity today lies in self-conscious experience, and in particular, the concepts of memory and imagination as elements of this experience. I will briefly reflect on these concepts here before explicating them in detail in the next section (section III). When Adorno argues that nature is to be found in the historical and the historical in the natural,

[183] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

he claims that even the gutting of our practical orientation toward nature is a sign of our guilt. But, this guilt is a practical orientation. This is the flip side of the claim that all reification is a forgetting.[184] When we take second nature, nature mediated by our own social activity, as natural, or first nature, we are repressing or otherwise ignoring our own guilt in constructing this second nature. But even more than this, even claims regarding what counts as first nature are implicated. As Lukács showed, nature simpliciter becomes the repository of science and aesthetic contemplation through the alienation that is produced through our creation of this second nature. To make natural this social activity is to effectively make it inevitable and thus beyond our responsibility, and thus nothing for which we could be guilty. And this is why Adorno argues that the historical is to be found in our treatment of nature, which includes our treatment of ourselves and other human beings.

Memory is thus the ability, first of all, to actually experience oneself as something other than the abstract functioning of this second nature, to experience oneself as more than merely a means to one's own self-preservation. If this second nature, as Lukács describes it, is marked by reification, then the way beyond reification must involve a form of reflection upon those very categories of second nature. The appearance or semblance (*Schein*) of this form of reflection is to be found in our bodily gestures. And the experience of the world as it is, the world of second nature, as uncomfortable, alienating, painful, guilt-ridden, does appear in our bodily orientations. The physical moment, which I've referred to above as the impulse, and which Adorno claims is a remnant "from before the split between extra- and intra-mental,"[185] is the source of these bodily gestures and thus that which we must experience if we are to engage in remembrance. So, the

[184] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 191.
[185] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 228.

body, in particular, the contortions we put ourselves through, can be taken as evidence of the interceding of social pressures on our impulses. Self-preservation recoils on the subject in its repression of this impulse. But, these contortions are precisely a forgetting. They are the continued assertion of the principle of individuation, of control over ourselves and the outer environment, over nature, even when they no longer advance the very goal for which the principle was asserted. Numerous examples reveal the repression and inversion of this impulse. The orientation to our own bodies is distorted in various ways by a multitude of social forces. The fast food and pre-packaged food industries, the diet industry, the exercise industry, the health food industry, and the culture industry in general all contribute to the contortions we put our bodies through. While these are largely unconscious contortions, that we frequently and consciously become unhappy in our pursuit of self-preservation in its current form is further evidence that what would truly make us happy is undermined in our relationship with our second nature, the forces we have ourselves shaped, yet that appear out of our control. "[I]n this age of universal social repression, the picture of freedom against society live in the crushed, abused individual features alone."[186] In terms of the concept of memory then, there must be an experience of these contortions as wrong. To remember in this sense means to call into question the very social forces that produce the contortions of our bodies and thus the experience of their wrongness through the ability to bring concepts and their history in relation to the suffering and guilt surrounding and interpenetrating the subject.

Connected to this experience of wrongness is the ability to envision, if only in passing, something different. Adorno, while engaging in a critique of idealism, locates the possibility of this experience in the exercise of the productive imagination. "The fact that without a will there

[186]Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 265.

is no consciousness is blurred by the idealists by sheer identity, as if the will were nothing but consciousness. In the most profound concept of transcendental epistemology, the concept of productive imagination, the trace of the will invades the pure intellective function."[187] So, in this critique, the productive imagination, as a concept of idealism, actually points beyond idealism's identification of will and consciousness to this material moment in the body. Most abstractly, to engage in remembrance, to experience one's self as unfree, requires the ability to envision the possibility of a world in which one is free, in which one's own impulses can be acted upon in ways that are not mediated by the existing form of self-preservation which produces these wrong orientations toward our own bodies, and eventually even our conscious actions. To put this another way, reification, or rather, the mechanism through which reification takes its hold on individuals, the imagination, allows the current organization of society to offer up visions of the future, but without the possibility of certain things, for example, the principle of self-preservation, being any different. The principle of self-preservation becomes nature; we are to believe that it, in its current form, is unchangeable and thus a necessary aspect of any society. Social Darwinism and the reduction of freedom to the freedom to compete then, not only assume the current form of self-preservation as a necessity, but turn this supposed necessity into a virtue.

This imaginative projection into the future remains abstract when thinking through the relationship one has to one's self, because it still reifies the individual. It is only when the sociality of individuals is brought into the picture that the impulse to freedom begins to become concrete. For, if the individual, as it stands today as the product of the historical victory of the principle of self-preservation, merely asserts its experience of unfreedom, it is still always possible for this to be interpreted as the assertion of power over others. But, then freedom is

[187] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 230.

merely purchased at the price of others' unfreedom, and indeed, the impulse, the physical moment is not redeemed, but once again mediated by self-preservation and turned to the cause of injustice and oppression. The sign of the natural in the historical is to be found, however, in our gestures of compassion toward others that occur without the direct mediation of the principle of self-preservation. When we see another in pain, we are moved to act. Take for example, the case of Wesley Autrey, who, upon seeing a man have an epileptic seizure and fall into the path of an oncoming subway train, jumped on to the tracks and placed his body over the man's as the train passed overhead. This is a dramatic example of an everyday aversion to the suffering of others. We take Autrey's actions as an act of heroism, since he so obviously put himself at risk in order to rescue another from physical suffering. Other, less dramatic actions also evidence this aversion to suffering. The immediate motion toward someone who slips provides an example. This is also an expression of a spontaneous solidarity with others, an expression that what happens to her matters to me. "[C]onscience consisted in the self's devotion to something outside itself, in the ability to make the true concerns of others one's own. This ability involves reflection as an interpenetration of receptivity and imagination."[188] It requires both the impulse of the body and the imaginative projection into the place of the other. The bodily impulse as it has been articulated here then begins to coincide with contemporary sentimentalist meta-ethical positions coming out of the analytic tradition. For example, Michael Slote argues that ethical norms can only be generated by the facts of empathy.[189]

The connection to Adorno's motivations for reorienting practical reason toward the body (see the conclusion to Part II) and nature stems from the qualitative and quantitative axes of

[188] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 164.
[189] Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2010).

suffering since the western Enlightenment. The character of suffering is historical. First of all, overcoming scarcity on a worldwide scale is not a possibility until the industrialization of agriculture and manufacture. But, this possibility has not been realized, and so we can now characterize this as a failure on our part as opposed to something natural. Of course, this does not prevent certain ideologues from asserting the naturalness of that scarcity, and thus justifying certain types of suffering as inevitable and so, outside our responsibility. This changes the quality of suffering. One, potentially at least, can experience this suffering as contingent. In addition, the sheer horror of suffering in the present is in some senses new. This is not to claim, and Adorno would not endorse the view, that the horrors of slavery, the genocide of American Indians, and other atrocities prior to the industrialization of death do not warrant their own analysis. But, suffering in a Nazi concentration or death camp, or from radiation poisoning as a result of atomic weapon use have a qualitative character all their own. Lastly, in terms of sheer numbers, again the Holocaust or the use of atomic weapons over Nagasaki and Hiroshima may not rival the genocide in the Americas or European and American slavery, but in terms of numbers over time, there is something quantitatively new.

Thus, Adorno articulates the demand that any theoretical apparatus, if it is to claim to be critical, must orient itself toward the disasters of the twentieth century, in particular, the Holocaust, the atom bomb, and "torture as a permanent institution."[190] Auschwitz is a symbol for the fact that there are fates worse than death to be feared in the contemporary world, and Hiroshima represents the potential for an entire population to be wiped from the earth in an instant. Interestingly, in both these cases, memory of the atrocity itself is potentially eliminated along with the human beings. In first hand accounts from the Holocaust, especially those from

[190]See Lecture 14 in Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*.

the death camps, the survivors frequently express that they thought there would remain no record of what had been done to people there. The concept of guilt, thus returns, firstly, as our inability to redeem the injustices of the past. People suffered in this way, and there is no undoing the suffering. Yet, we live off the future that emerged from this past. Secondly, our guilt continues. Our happiness is bought at the price of others' suffering, and even that happiness is fleeting. The consumptive habits of the economically well-off are carried along on the backs of the exploited and abused laborers. Lastly, Adorno points out our mere statistical guilt. By merely surviving in a system that is organized such that some must not, each of our lives has ensured someone's death. The first step in at least doing theoretical justice to guilt, then, is to more clearly articulate experience as self-conscious memory and imagination through which the suffering body is connected to reason and the species. The injustices of the past in some sense cannot be redeemed, no matter the future. Yet, the aim of philosophical work must be to redeem them. This is why the imagination is also important. It allows for perspectives to "be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light."[191]

Section III Experience: Self-Consciousness, Memory and Imagination

In the last section, the beginnings of the relationship between universals and bodily suffering were articulated. The key to getting to their relationship is within the concepts of experience and memory. Experience, we saw, however cannot be reduced to the mere immediacy of experience that empiricism to this day relies on: "Pure immediacy and fetishism are equally untrue. In our insistence on immediacy against reification we are (as perceived in Hegel's institutionalism) relinquishing the element of otherness in dialectics—as arbitrary a

[191]Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1978), 247.

procedure as the later Hegel's unfeasible practice to arrest dialectics in something solid beyond it."[192] And this is why the mere impulse to freedom and the moral addendum are necessary, but not sufficient for Adorno's normative stance. "Thus, practice, including political practice, calls for theoretical consciousness at its most advanced, and on the other hand, it needs the corporeal element, the very thing that cannot be fully identified with reason."[193] So, in what follows, then I will make the concept of experience in Adorno more concrete while attempting to link memory, universals, and the bodily aversion to others' suffering through this concept of experience. To do so, first some of Benjamin's key insights into experience will be explicated. Next, I will show the link between these insights and Adorno's own thinking about experience and its possibility in the contemporary world. In doing so, I will start from the facts of suffering and the aversion to suffering in the body. Following this, I connect the ability for memory and imagination through brief analyses of freedom and nationalism. I then link these abilities together and with the species in a concept of self-conscious experience. Finally, I link these abilities to objective conditions and illustrate the possibility of ethical subjectivity with two contemporary examples.

Benjamin on Experience

Both Adorno and Benjamin distinguish *Erfahrung* from *Erlebnis*. Both terms translate into English as experience. But, both Benjamin and Adorno are reacting against the immediacy and giveness that is supposed to be present in *Erlebnis*, especially in the philosophies of Dilthey and Bergson. Adorno in particular is also rejecting an empiricist version of experience. So, in unpacking Adorno's conception of experience, we have to distinguish between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. When Adorno refers to experience as *Erlebnis*, he frequently does so with a disdainful

[192] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 374-5.
[193] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 238.

twist, calling it *Urerlebnisse*, primal experience, dismissing with it the unmediated given that is supposed to be at the root of Heidegger's ontology as well as other philosophical systems that emerge from Husserl's phenomenological approach.

In Benjamin's “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” he situates Baudelaire's poetry as an attempt to recapture *Erfahrung* in the time of its passing.[194] Because of the shocks of modern life, in particular, the urban life of the crowd, *Erfahrungen* have been stripped of their aura, and we are thus left with only the shocks of that life. But, in relaying the very experiences of shock, *Chockerlebnis*, as though they possessed an aura, as though there remained an element of ritual which would link the individual *Erlebnis* to the collective experience of human beings and thus transform it into the matter of *Erfahrung*, Baudelaire's poetry is capable of getting at what experience means in the industrialized world. With the mechanization of the world, including the mechanical reproduction of art, the involuntary memory, a concept taken from Proust, and most characteristically illustrated by his famous *madeleine* and the memories it prompts, the experiences of aura and ritual are eviscerated and with them and connection between the isolated experience and the collective experience. Consciousness, as the ability to fend off sensory input, is overwhelmed by the persistence of shocks in the contemporary world, and as such prevents the sedimentation of the sorts of memories that could later be activated in the manner of Proust's *mémoire involuntaire*.

But, in linking his reflections to Proust's, Benjamin seems to leave us with the problem — the same problem that Lukács explicates and with which the chapter began — the inability to have the sorts of experiences that would reinvigorate memory and thus some connection to

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[194] Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Selected Writings v. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1996), 313-343.

nature and thus experience as *Erfahrung*. For Proust involuntary memory is brought about by chance, the eating of the *madeleine* is responsible for the ability to access memories which link his individual experiences with that of the collective through ritual and aura. "According to Proust, it is a matter of chance whether an individual forms an image of himself, whether he can take hold of his experience."[195] Benjamin, however, counters the seemingly mutual exclusivity of consciousness and memory with Baudelaire's poetry. Through it, Benjamin argues, the shock experience (*Chockerlebnis*) of modernity is "given the weight of long experience [*Erfahrung*]."[196] For example, the eye and the gaze, as related in Baudelaire's poetry, is bereft of the distance that creates the aura necessary for beauty and experience. It is because the poet gives himself over to the "eyes-without-a-gaze," that he is capable of relating the meaningfulness of a distance that has been lost. "In the protective eye, there is no daydreaming surrender to distance and to faraway things."[197] A psuedo-aura is given by the very shock experiences that are characteristic of the contemporary world. The meaning of this sort of experience, while bereft of meaning and the possibility of memory in Proust's sense of involuntary memory, is captured precisely by Baudelaire's ability to relate the coldness of modern life. And this coldness also provides a link to the collective experience of the bourgeoisie; coldness is the mode of life in the modern world.

In reflecting on Benjamin's "One-Way Street," a piece in which similar themes regarding experience emerge, Adorno points out that Benjamin is engaged in the construction of *Denkbilder*, thought images, which provide for a physiognomy of modern life in which the

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[195]Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 315.
[196]Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 343.
[197]Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 341.

subjective experience of the world is redeemed as the objective truth about that life. This redemption is possible, from Adorno's perspective, because Benjamin engages in "a process of succumbing to the object to the point of the literal extinction of the self."[198] And in his introduction to Benjamin's post-humously collected works, Adorno notes that Benjamin's form of thought, rather than attempting a direct correspondence between thought and idea, "is a constellation of ideas that, as he may have envisioned it, together form the divine Name, and in each case these ideas crystallize in details, which are their force field."[199]

Thus, from Adorno's reflections on Benjamin here, several points are relevant for thinking through experience, memory, and imagination: first, the attempt to find the universal within the concrete, to always remain in touch with the object of theory, rather than fitting the objects of investigation to the theory—and this is what Adorno redeems in a form of Benjamin's constellative procedure, second, the notion of memory as the related to this way of being in touch with the object of analysis through concepts and whose possibility is in question in the contemporary world, third, the notion of coldness as a way to characterize normal contemporary experience, finally, the link with the Name of the divine, which in secular form is the connection between memory, imagination, and concepts. Adorno is not merely explicating Benjamin's ideas, but linking his own methods and insights to Benjamin's in a tangental way. For example, in *Negative Dialectics*, at the end of his reflections on natural history, Adorno quotes Benjamin in order to explicate the role of philosophy in the contemporary world: "it would be up to thought to see all nature, and whatever would install itself as such, as history, and all history as nature—

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[198] Theodor Adorno, "Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*," in *Notes on Literature, v. II,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 327.

[199] Theodor Adorno, "Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*," *Notes on Literature, v. II*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 223.

'to grasp historic being in its utmost historic definition, in the place where it is most historic, as natural being, or to grasp nature, in the place where it seems most deeply, inertly natural, as historic being.'"[200]

Adorno's conception of experience as self-conscious memory and imagination

Experience as a concept in Adorno's thought then is closely linked to Benjamin's usage of *Erfahrung* as well as his criticism of the immediacy of experience in the concept of *Erlebnis*. It is through this notion of experience that Adorno links the physical body, in particular, the body that suffers with the universality of concepts that are still available to a critique of existing social reality. But, similar to the way in which Adorno characterizes Benjamin's approach in creating *Denkbilder*, the concepts themselves can only be redeemed through an immersion in the objects to which they are supposed to supposed to apply.

"Ideas that have confidence in their own objectivity have to surrender *va banque*, without mental reservations, to the object in which they immerse themselves, even if that object is another idea; this is the insurance premium they pay for not being a system. Transcendent critique avoids from the outset the experience of what is other than its own consciousness."[201]

The normative import of a concept can only be had, not through the mere application of a universal to a particular, nor even with an immanent application of a universal that a system claims for itself to that system, but rather only through the subjective experience of the object in question, even if that object is a concept. A concept's claim to universality is always mediated by subjective experience, yet the truth of the concept is only to be had through a resistance to the tendency, implicit in all judgment, to apply concepts to objects without acknowledgment of the object's spilling over the concept. It is only with adequate experience of the object that critique

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[200] Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutsches Trauerspiel,* (Frankfurt: 1963), 197. Cited in Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 359.

[201] Theodor Adorno, "Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel," in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993), 146.

of either the concept or the object can begin.

What constitutes experience of this sort then? Adorno explicates experience of this sort through suffering and the body, but in a way in which it also requires self-consciousness. And self-consciousness must involve the kind of memory and imagination sketched in the previous section (part III, section II). While the suffering body that motivates thought itself, the thinker must be changed by the experience, or it does not constitute experience, and thus what she is engaged in does not constitute thought. In this way, one can make sense of Adorno's dismissals of positivist attempts to eliminate values from thought as not really thought at all, but rather, something like the scientific cataloging of specimens. Experience (*Erfahrung*) always carries with it the bodily moment, or else becomes mere *Erlebnis*, a living in immediacy, and thus a justification for what exists. But, in Benjamin's conception of *Erfahrung*, the individual experience must be connected to the collective and its memory in some fashion through the aura. This is what Baudelaire's poetry accomplishes, though after the failure of the aura. The collective for Adorno, however, can only mean the species itself. As I showed in chapter 3, the potential for experience (*Erfahrung*) is linked to the species' ability to constitute itself as a species. So, then, so far, experience in this specialized sense requires a bodily moment that at once prompts self-consciousness, but also an immersion in the object of reflection. And, in addition, this self-consciousness must be linked to the concept of humanity in some fashion through memory. In order to explicate this conception of experience in more detail, first, I will return to the notion of suffering, concluding that the redemption of the aversion to suffering requires a form of self-consciousness, and in particular the sort of memory spelled out above, in which concepts can be brought into relation to the immediate experience of suffering. Next, I will connect these conclusions to what Adorno calls the memory of freedom. Following this, the

imagination must be explicated in more detail. I do so through Adorno's reflections on nationalism. To bring all this together and connect the memory and imagination of the individual to the collective, the species, in a way sufficient to both Benjamin's insights regarding the state of memory today and Adorno's reflections on progress, I conclude the theoretical aspect of this with Adorno's reflections on society and self-preservation. Finally, I offer an illustration of these ideas' plausibility and the possibilities of ethical subjectivity under current conditions.

In explaining the possibility of the pogrom, Adorno shows how human beings are turned into something else in the perceptions of the executioners, and in a way that draws on Benjamin's reflections on Baudelaire. Here, the response of a perpetrator, or even a spectator, to the gaze of the victim determines the possibility of the pogrom.

> "*People are looking at you.*— Indignation over cruelty diminishes in proportion as the victims are less like normal readers, the more they are swarthy, 'dirty,' dago-like. This throws as much light on the crimes as on the spectators. Perhaps the social schematization of perception in anti-Semites is such that they do not see Jews as human beings at all. The constantly encountered assertion that savages, blacks, Japanese are like animals, monkeys for example, is the key to the pogrom. The possibility of pogroms is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally-wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze—'after all, its only an animal'—reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators having again and again to reassure themselves that it is 'only an animal', because they could never fully believe this even of animals. In repressive society the concept of man is itself a parody of divine likeness. The mechanism of 'pathic projection' determines that those in power perceive as human only their own reflected image, instead of reflecting back as human precisely what is different. Murder is thus the repeated attempt, by yet greater madness, to distort the madness of such false perception into reason: what was not seen as human and yet is human, is made a thing, so that its stirrings can no longer refute the manic gaze."[202]

Immediately, there is an aversion to suffering, even to the suffering of an animal. But, whether on the level of perception or the level of conscious reason, this aversion is eliminated, rationalized away as not counting, as not real suffering, since "it is only an animal." Recall the quote with which part III, section 2 began, in which Adorno asserts that Hitler has imposed a

[202] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 105.

new categorical imperative. There he claims, “dealing discursively with it would be an outrage.” Here we have an explanation as to why. The imperative is not derived from reason alone, but rather the discursive formulation of the impulse, this aversion to suffering. Thus, to deal with it through the terms of the contemporary form of reason already makes the pogrom a possibility, something to be contemplated under certain conditions, say under threats of terrorism, it now becomes reasonable to torture certain people. The evidence for this is, of course, all around us. Pick up any contemporary anthology on torture or simply listen to the former vice-president. I won't dwell on this. For, as it stands, Adorno appears, then to simply be advocating a form of natural law theory or sentimentalism. But, this is not the case. Instead, while we must take this aversion to suffering seriously, even in the face of these rationalizations, Adorno here also gets at the necessity of self-consciousness, in particular, a sort of memory that can bring key concepts to the fore. That is, “In repressive society, the concept of man is itself a parody of divine likeness.” Memory here, then, is the ability to bring the concepts of human and animal into relation to the aversion to suffering. The concept of the human, as all are equally made in god's image, that is, given its history in monotheism and then natural law theory, while providing a way “of reflecting back as human precisely what is different,” is distorted by contemporary reason into mere power over. To get through this rationalization, the aversion to suffering is clearly not sufficient, it requires reflection on the very concepts used to justify racism, genocide, and the pogrom, human and animal. And the perpetrators and spectators then murder as a culmination of the belief that the victims do not suffer, “because they could never fully believe this even of animals.”

This tenuous link between the suffering body and memory in this sense also appears in the relationship that contemporary subjects have to their own freedom. While we are formally free, the implication of the demands made upon us in relation to the whole, in our social

positions, is that we ought to be substantively free. The level of activity expected from us implies the ability to effect change in the institutions under which we labor. The experience of being overwhelmed, thus is rational in that it's source is to be found in the historical evolution of the concept of freedom. The experience is valid in so far as it gets at this "memory" of freedom.

> "All these things are probably no more than a cover for the fact that we live in a society based on formal freedom, and in return for this formal freedom it demands that we wholeheartedly devote our efforts to whatever has fallen to our lot, while at the same time preventing us from doing so because of the overwhelming power of its institutions and the overwhelming power with which it confronts us at every moment. This, I would say, is the concrete form in which we experience the question of freedom and unfreedom today....What marks out this feeling of chronic overwork is that it always contains, in a concealed form of course, something like a memory of freedom. That is to say, unless we felt that we ought by rights to be free, that we ought to be free persons to be able to cope with all the demands that have been made, we would not have this chronic feeling of being overstretched, a feeling that is undoubtedly far keener than the feeling of 'care' [*Sorge*] and similar ideas that the existentialists tell us about."[203]

Memory in this sense of drawing out the history of concepts, then gets us someway in thinking about a concept of experience that makes possible a practical orientation to the world, a stance that certain conditions should not be. And, as was shown in both of these situations, the memory of these concepts also links us with the collective, though in such a way that one recognizes the failures to realize the concepts, rather than the aura of a tradition that should be affirmed.

The phenomenon of nationalism thus provides a way into this link between the experience of suffering and some notion of the species as a self-constituted whole. The problem, however, is that nationalism is pathological, a way in which the power of the collective is confirmed, yet without either the element of self-constitution or the potential solidarity with humanity that I am linking to the individual's suffering.

> "The characteristic form of absurd opinion today is nationalism. With new virulence, it infects the entire world, in a historical period, where, because of the state of the technical forces of production and the potential definition of the earth as a single planet, at least in the non-underdeveloped countries nationalism has lost its real basis and has become the full blown

[203] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 205.

ideology it has always been. In private life, self-praise and anything resembling it is suspect, because such expressions reveal all too much the predominance of narcissism. The more individuals are caught up in themselves and the more fatally they pursue particular interests—interests that are reflected in that narcissistic attitude, which in turn reinforces the rigid power of the interests—the more carefully this very principle must be concealed and misrepresented, so that, as the National Socialist slogan has it, 'service before self.' However, it is precisely this force of taboo on individual narcissism, its repression, that gives nationalism its pernicious power. The life of the collective has different ground rules than those at work in the relations between individuals. In every soccer match the local fans, flouting the rules of hospitality, shamelessly cheer on their own team....People would only need take the norms of bourgeois private life to heart and raise them to the level of society. But well-meaning recommendations in this vein overlook the fact that any transition of this kind is impossible under conditions that impose such privations on individuals, so constantly disappoint their individual narcissism, in reality damn them to such helplessness, that they are condemned to collective narcissism. As a compensation, collective narcissism then restores to them as individuals some of the self-esteem the same collective strips from them and that they hope to fully recover through delusive identification with it. More than any other pathological prejudice, the belief in the nation is opinion as dire fate: the hypostasis of the group to which one just happens to belong, the place where one just happens to be, into an absolute good and superiority. It inflates into a moral maxim that abominable wisdom born of emergency situations, that we are all in the same boat. It is just as ideological to distinguish healthy national sentiment from pathological nationalism as it is to believe in normal opinion in contrast to pathogenic opinion. The dynamic that leads from the supposedly healthy national sentiment into its overvalued excess is unstoppable, because its untruth is rooted in the person's identifying himself with the irrational nexus of nature and society in which he by chance finds himself."[204]

Given the state of real helplessness, the overwhelming momentum of social forces operating behind peoples' backs, the privations, both material and emotional that are foisted on people living under such a system, irrational identification with a collective is, almost literally, all people have. Individuals' real and perceived weakness could be the basis for change, but instead is turned into a way to keep people bound to the relationships that put them in a position of weakness in the first place. The connection with objective helplessness is eviscerated and replaced with a subjective feeling that can be remedied with individual action. This is the elimination of experience in the sense Adorno speaks of. The notion that one's experience is objective, an object to be reflected upon, mediated, is lost and replaced with the subjective

[204] Adorno, "Opinion, Delusion, Society," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, ed. and trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 117-18.

feeling that merely requires some immediate action in order to compensate. Memory,in the sense above is eliminated. The potential object of rational reflection is turned over to the irrational forces of the psyche, which in turn is the product of both psychological and non-psychological factors. "The concept of the ego is dialectical, both psychic and extrapsychic, a quantum of libido and the representative of outside reality."[205] Healthy national sentiment is already pathological insofar as it already, even without explicitly endorsing the horrors of jingoistic nationalism run wild, evidences precisely the same logic.

But, we can also see the possibilities of something different. Adorno assumes that there is an objective possibility to eliminate the necessity of nationalism, that is, that people could be free in a way that does not require the logic of us and them, for me or against me. This assumption, as the ability of productive forces to provide for all human needs, I think is unquestionable. And, the very concepts used to make nationalism seem natural, and thus inevitable, can open the possibility of something different. The taboo on narcissism, that is, a concept of selflessness that societies demand of their members, provides one possibility. In addition, the concept of hospitality also reveals individual possibilities. Now, Adorno immediately undermines the application of these concepts. For, the ego is too weak in the face of deprivation to engage in the sort of selflessness that would undermine nationalism, the very cause of that weakness.

This is why the concept of imagination is required to understand the possibility of ethical subjectivity. I conceive of imagination here as the ability to hold open these concepts as they are "remembered" in a self-conscious way. That is, by not determining the concepts before hand, but rather letting them emerge from the experience of the object and in relation to one another,

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[205]Theodor Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology, Part II," trans. Irving N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* I/47 (1968): 86.

one holds open possibilities from the past and brings forth new possibilities as well. Adorno, in describing the play of children, actually attributes to them an unconscious knowledge of the falsity of the commodity. In depriving

> "the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign toward men and not what subserves the exchange relation that equally deforms men and things. The little trucks travel nowhere and the tiny barrels on them are empty; yet they remain true to their destiny by not performing, not participating in the process of abstraction that level down that destiny, but instead abide as allegories of what they are specifically for."[206]

In a sort of imaginative mimicry of the world of work, children show up the falsity of that world. By removing the exchange relation, at least in imagination, they show in their purposeless activity the possibility of the actions they mimic. And this possibility also remains in art. For, art, "by withdrawing into the imagination" does not fully participate in actual material relations and so "does not resign itself to adaptation, does not prolong external violence in internal deformation."[207]

But, as we saw in the last chapter, while the concept of progress points to the missed opportunity to constitute ourselves as a species, the fact is that we have not. Even with the possibilities held onto by a self-conscious experience informed through memory and imagination. So how is it possible to connect the individual experience of phenomenon with the species? The remaining avenues are to be found in reflection upon the very institutions that prohibit the species' realization as a self-constituted humanity. Even in Kant's reflections, our will to self-preservation is at the heart of the species' ability to reach a state of perpetual peace. Mediated through the nation-state, the attempts to preserve ourselves are supposed to guarantee that republican nations will refrain from war, encourage trade, and mediate conflict between

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[206] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 228.
[207] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 214.

nations that have not yet reached republican forms of government. Kant, in attempting to take seriously those skeptical of peace on the grounds of some idea of human nature turns the concept of human nature against them. While the puzzles and problems with this account were made clear, Adorno does attempt something of the same form in his attempts to redeem a concept of humanity and solidarity.

The concept of self-preservation is ambiguous for Adorno. It at once seems to undermine the very reason that Adorno would like to use to critique contemporary societies, but it also provides a way for getting at those societies' failures. This is clear when Adorno links the suffering body to the failed realization of the species.

> "All activities of the species point to its continued physical existence, although they may be misconceptions of it, independent organizations whose business is done only by the way. Even the steps which society takes to exterminate itself are at the same time absurd acts of unleashed self-preservation. They are forms of unconscious social action against suffering even though an obtuse view of society's own interests turns their particularity against that interest. Confronted with such steps, their purpose—and this alone makes a society a society—calls for it to be so organized as the the productive forces would directly permit it here and now, and as the conditions of production on either side relentlessly prevent it. The *telos* of such an organization of society would be to negate the physical suffering of even the least of its members, and to negate the internal reflexive forms of that suffering. By now, this negation in the interests of all can be realized only in a solidarity that is transparent to itself and all the living."[208]

Society, by its mere concept, implies the goal of ending the suffering of its members. This can even be garnered from the concept of the social contract in its use by classical liberals from Hobbes through Rousseau and Kant. The reason for entering a society, the self-interests of the individual, implies the norm of overcoming suffering. But, this is not merely an ad-hoc determinate negation of liberalism. For, beyond this sort of analysis, the concept of self-preservation is also implicated. Even societies' attempts to destroy themselves are really attempts to preserve themselves that have gone horribly wrong. The concept of society implies

[208] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203-4.

the concept of self-preservation and its application to both itself and its members. But, by introducing the concept of self-preservation, the implied unity between the society and its members is also undermined. There is no unity without the ending of the suffering of its members. Thus the experience of suffering is a political experience, or at least potentially so. If one can experience her own suffering as unnecessary, as a problem with the social organization in which she exists, there is forged a tenuous connection between the individual and humanity.

To put this all together, through the concepts of self-preservation, humanity as the species' self-constitution, and knowledge as shot through with bodily impulses, Adorno creates a constellation in which experience of specific sort provides the insight through which a sort of practical orientation toward existing societies become available, even if that orientation cannot offer a code for action or a decision procedure for individual cases. It shows the possibility of no longer holding on to domination as the principle of organization of our second nature.

Society, as a collective attempt to bring about a better world for all, requires that one care about the suffering of others, even when this attempt is expressed through actions that will obviously bring about suffering. And this is how, through the concept of a self-conscious experience, held together through memory and imagination, a practical orientation toward the world remains possible. Decent satire offers a way to understand sort of thinking. A news story in the satirical paper, *The Onion*, right after the "shock and awe" bombing campaign of Iraq shows this. A short article titled, "Dead Iraqi Would Have Loved Democracy," relates how Taha Sabri was no fan of Hussein and was completely in favor of democracy, but that he was killed when a cruise missile hit his home.[209] Of course, all the details here are fictional. Nonetheless, it shows the "liberation" of Iraq for what is was, the killing of innocents who had nothing to do

[209] *The Onion*, March 26, 2003, http://www.theonion.com/articles/dead-iraqi-would-have-loved-democracy,1421/ (Accessed on May 27, 2010).

with the nonexistent weapons of mass destruction or the regime in power. But, it also requires an ability to empathize to even understand the piece. For certainly this did happen to specific people. The deadpan tone of the article depends on the reader to carry out the implication and self-reflection required for the ironic effect. The liberation of Iraq implied the end of the precondition for that liberation, the lives of the people who were to be liberated. So, in a simplified form, the physical impulse against one's own and others suffering tells us *that* something is wrong. It is through thinking through the concepts involved in the particulars of suffering that tells us *what* is wrong. For, the satire requires, not just the aversion to suffering, but also the ability to then bring the appropriate concepts into play with that impulse. Here, in particular, democracy and freedom, "liberation." And as this example of satire illustrates, the contemporary subject is still capable of an ethical orientation, even if it only results in the grimace in the face of others' suffering. That grimace is the appearance of the possibility of a realized morality.

The concept of human rights provides a further demonstration of the power of Adorno's sort of analysis for understanding social reality. While human rights as they exist in international law are the product of a particular collective experience, they are the most progressive internationally agreed to norms for the conduct of national politics and even international relations. Of course, these rights have been subjected to criticism from non-western actors as well as western intellectuals. Adorno himself, in a passage cut from the final draft of *Minima Moralia* calls the world to task, not on the specific rights that are included in the Declaration, but on the grounds that nationalism and capitalism will prevent them from being enforced in any meaningful way. He specifically and prophetically calls out the world for including language that prohibits genocide, all the while implying, by naming it, that it will happen, and creating

societies that will be unwilling to enforce the prohibition. But, at the same time, naming what has happened is necessary "if the victims—in any case too many for their names to be recalled—were to be spared the curse of having no thoughts turned unto them."[210] So, while the universal claims made in the Declaration are not questioned directly by Adorno, the ability of contemporary societies to achieve them is. They have become abstractions, even if they were not so from the start. In the passage above from "Opinion, Delusion, Society," characteristic of this sort of criticism, Adorno remarks on nationalism and its absurdity. Nationalism could be overcome if only we took seriously the bourgeois ideal of hospitality. Implied, even in the liberal state is the concept of hospitality through which we are supposed to treat our home as though it belonged to the visitors. But, this ideal is blocked by the social imposition of deprivation and the resulting collective narcissism of the citizenry. In terms of the approach marked out above, nationalism has become natural; it has become reified. And in the phenomenon of nationalism, in particular, in the declarations of its naturalness, one finds the social forces at play in constructing the reality of the contemporary nation-state. The functioning of the contemporary nation-state depends on its pseudo-democratic decision procedures for legitimation and these procedures depend on the impoverishment of experience, a turning of the suffering that could be experienced along with solidarity into actions that instead demonstrate narcissism and paranoia. Thus, through Adorno's analysis, one can at once grasp the normative force of human rights and, at the same time, the failure of the species to achieve them.

A brief examination of a specific violation of the genocide prohibition will demonstrate these concepts and the capabilities of Adorno's approach bit more concretely. On April 6th , 1994, a plane carrying both the President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, and the President of

[210]Theodor Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle," trans. Edmund Jephcott, *New Left Review* I/200 (1993): 6.

Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down as it was landing in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. Following this, a coordinated attempt to eliminate ethnic Tutsi as well as moderate Hutus was undertaken. As the United States, especially at this point in post-cold war history had claimed to be the last remaining superpower, leader of the free world, and suchlike titles, it is productive to focus on the reaction here. In particular, just a glance at the pieces that appeared in the New York *Times,* the country's supposedly liberally aligned newspaper, garners key insights into the refusal of western powers to intervene, and even the refusal to use the word "genocide" to describe the killing.

Almost immediately, the paper's coverage implied that the state of conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi groups was natural and thus inevitable. In the April 9th edition, two pieces advance this view: an op-ed written by former Clinton administration Deputy Secretary of State, Clifton R. Wharton Jr.[211] and a "news" piece titled "2 Nations Joined by Common History of Genocide," by Jerry Gray, who seems to have no other qualifications than working at the New York *Times* as an editor.[212] The language used in both pieces is startling. Wharton's piece, while imploring the reader against the view that democracy cannot take hold in some places, actually tends to reinforce such a view.

> "What has happened in Burundi and Rwanda may reinforce a widely held view in the West that democratic roots simply will not sprout in some African countries, which are often seen as hybrid political creations throwing together tribes and cultures whose only common heritage, unless held in check by a brutal dictatorship, is warfare against one another. There may be some truth to this view -- but it does not apply only to Africa. Ancient hatreds and a lack of democratic traditions also lie behind the struggle in several former Soviet republics and of course in Bosnia. Africa's smaller nations continue their bloodshed and turmoil largely out of sight, often considered a lost cause."

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[211] Clifton Wharton Jr., "The Nightmare in Central Africa," The New York *Times*, April 9, 1994, Section 1, 21.

[212] Jerry Gray, "2 Nations Joined by Common History of Genocide,"The New York *Times*, April 9, 1994, Section 1, 6.

So, while the genocide is supposedly at fault for the view that genocide is inevitable, “there may be some truth to this view.” And further, it's not only true of Africa, but wide swaths of the planet that are outside of the American and western European direct sphere of influence. In addition, the piece itself is written as a sort of obituary for former President Ndadaye of Burundi as well as his successor, Cyprien Ntaryamira and their heroic attempts to overcome the history of genocide in the region. Skipped over in the piece is the history of colonialism or any mention of what could be done to stave off the genocide. Thus, the reader is left with the piece's ultimate conclusion, America cannot push democracy on other countries without an accommodation of “historical reality.” Since that historical reality is one of ethnic divide, with which the west apparently had nothing to do with creating, the conflict and genocide seem to be none of our business.

As if this weren't enough, Gray's piece, in a mere 861 words, purports to be a history of the two nations involved, Burundi and Rwanda. And that history is a history of genocide. In a direct analogy to nature, Gray claims, “the bloodletting in Rwanda and Burundi runs through the history of both countries as fluidly as the meandering Akanyaru River that marks their common border.” Beyond this, the article recapitulates debunked racialist theories about the origins of the Hutu and Tutsi groups and their conflicts in central Africa. Take this gem, for example, “The first recorded tribal clashes date to the 15th century, when the Tutsi -- a tall and elegant Nilotic people also known as the Watusi -- migrated from Ethiopia and imposed feudal rule over the Hutu, a short, stocky Bantu people living in the forested hills.” This replicates the racialist theories of colonial powers, specifically, the Hammite theory, the authors of which, upon finding Rwanda essentially organized as a monarchy, could not imagine that an African country could organize itself as a European nation had without a European influence. The European colonists

thus theorized that settlers of essentially European ethnicity, but dark skin, the Tutsi, the would-be Hammites, had at some earlier date colonized this region of backward Africa. And indeed, as Mahmood Mamdani argues, the deployment of the settler/native distinction was subsequently crucial to the "popularity" of the genocide among the Hutu.[213] And so, ironically, the European use of the Hammite theory forms part of the history that makes the Hutu genocide against the Tutsi "settlers" possible. Underneath the supposed natural distinction between Hutu and Tutsi, we find history and politics, colonialist invaders and post-colonial conflict deploying similar categories. In more general terms, the attempt to locate the historical within the supposedly natural begins to offer insights into the events both in Rwanda itself and the lack of western response to those events.

The notion of experience explicated above also offers a fruitful way of understanding the situation. The bourgeois coldness that Adorno argues characterizes the actual interactions of contemporary subjects shows up the western response to the genocide for what it is: a collective shoulder shrugging. This short-handed way of calling out western powers for inaction also contains the possibilities for a more detailed analysis. For, more than mere coldness, the lack of reaction requires a particular repression of nature, the moral addendum, the bodily rejection of suffering. The natural is to be found within the historical. In the contingent fact of the genocide and the western powers' response, one finds the potential to have done something, the bodily aversion to suffering must be "dealt with." This is why we need the ideological justifications of the conflict in the New York *Times*. "Experiences of real helplessness are anything but irrational—and they are actually hardly psychological. On their own they might be expected to

[213]Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* , (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001).

prompt resistance to the social system rather than further assimilation to it."[214] But, the experience of the others' suffering is turned into the feeling of helplessness. The mediated potential for action is reduced to the immediate feeling of helplessness, which is at the same time real. Yet, despite all this, the possibility of an ethical orientation remains. The ethical subject, while in some sense powerless in the face of the direct forms of violence in Rwanda, can begin to redeem the suffering of others through a reflection on the possibilities of a different response. Concrete affirmation of this possibility was to be found in the actions of people in Rwanda who risked their own lives to save others.

Part IV. Concluding Remarks on the Possibility of Ethical Subjectivity

In this chapter, I have moved through some of the historically relevant insights that inform Adorno's conception of a practical orientation to the irrational world. Through insights from Hegel, Marx, Lukacs and Benjamin, the chapter arrives at Adorno's conception of the relationship between history and nature, which then structures his reflections upon ethical subjectivity under contemporary conditions. This movement culminates in reflection upon the possibility for a certain kind of experience, even in the face of social forces that tend to dissuade us from having experiences of this sort.

Before turning to the criticisms of Adorno in chapter 5, it is worthwhile to briefly outline what has been shown about experience here in chapter 4 and thus how a practical relation to the world remains possible. Heuristically, one can think of this along two lines, first, what conditions must be present for experience of the sort Adorno is after, and second, what makes the specific sort of experience that Adorno is after valid in the face of irrational social systems. The first question is really two, however. In addition to the *hypothetical* subjective conditions

[214] Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology, part II," 89.

for experience, one must also ask after what social conditions *actually* exist that would allow for such conditions to be met, what objectively must hold in order for subjective experience to be possible. The second question, that of validity, is really inseparable from the first. Experience in the relevant sense is rational.

In the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, it was made clear that some mediation by consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience that is linked to the ability to be an ethical subject; felt immediacy of an emotion like empathy is not sufficient for experience in this sense. One can understand this also in terms of a distinction between feeling and experience. For it is the turning of the impulsive aversion to bodily suffering into a mere feeling that undermines its ability to constitute an experience. As the example of nationalism shows, the impulse that something is not right can be turned into a mere feeling and in this way stripped of its potential to inaugurate self-consciousness of one's guilt and thus the memory of freedom and the imagination to pursue something different. Thus, this impulse is necessary, but not sufficient for experience. In addition, then, self-consciousness is necessary for experience. The structure of the subject's consciousness must be such that a practical orientation can arise in the difference between the self as identical with itself and the self as non-identical with itself. This difference is a relationship that makes the demand on the self that it become something other than what it is. This presupposes a subject with the capability of self-reflection such that the self as other can make a demand, the self as the demand that something ought to be or ought not to be. This ability for self-reflection, must also be linked to the social evolution of the species in some sense. This link to the species can no longer be provided in the aura produced by rituals. Instead, the possibility of linking one's individual life to the life of humanity, the species as self-constituted is to be found in the repository of concepts as they have evolved both

philosophically and historically. In this sense, memory is the ability to bring concepts to one's impulses through which one reflects on those impulses. This link to the conceptual history of the species is required because of the failure of the species to constitute itself as a species. Memory is the uncovering of the missed opportunities within the concepts, which could redeem the impulses of one's own experience. To summarize, four subjective conditions must hold for experience in this sense to be possible: 1. an impulse, here conceived as the bodily aversion to suffering, 2. self-consciousness, which contains the ability to recognize one's own guilt, the ability to make a demand that both objectively and subjectively things could be different, which really means a self-consciousness that is marked by 3. memory, here understood as the ability to reflect on the very concepts used to understand one's experiences in self-consciousness, and thus to recognize the missed possibilities within the concepts themselves, and 4. imagination, here conceived as the possibility of bringing something new into the world. In a way, this is merely the active ability to hold open the concepts that are used in self-consciousness to understand one's experience. That is, the ability to reformulate one's own experiences in light of one's own reflection upon the concepts implicated by those experiences. Putting these two aspects, memory and imagination, offers the moment, the present, in which "the power of experience breaks the spell of duration and gathers past and future into the present."[215]

In addition to the subjective abilities that must be in place for experience, there are objective conditions that must exist in order that the subjective abilities can be realized by actual subjects and that must exist before the idea of something different from current social conditions even makes sense. The latter sort of conditions are those that Marx theorized as the conditions

[215] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 165. Adorno, in this passage, is actually providing an analysis of this moment's opposite, the experience of one's life as nothingness. But, in this way he shows the possibility of experience of the sort outlined.

for the realization of the universal class. Adorno takes these as an uncontroversial matter of fact. It is possible, given the state of the technical forces of production that all people, the species as a whole, could be free from want. This fact enables the thought that we might organize ourselves differently, that we could decide, at least in principle, to no longer organize production around the construction of exchange-values and the reproduction of capital. Second, among the latter sort of conditions is that the means of communication and transportation are such that the species can be conceived of as a species. Beyond the radio, television and telephone that Adorno conceives of as sufficient for this conception, we now have in addition various networking technologies mediated by the cellular phone and personal computer.

The objective conditions that must be in place for the subjective abilities outlined above to be possible can be conceived of either positively or negatively. Negatively, there must be gaps in the process of "total societalization," as Adorno sometimes calls it, that allow room for the subjective ability to relate to suffering, become self-conscious of that suffering, reflect on the concepts used to understand that suffering, and finally to imagine something different in the world. Positively, there must be social ways of being that promote the subjective abilities outlined above. Consider each of the 4 subjective conditions in relation to their objective possibility given what has been established in this chapter.

The impulse, or the moral addendum, the bodily aversion to suffering, might be thought of a biological fact that no social conditions, other than those that might change our genetic make-up, might undermine. Adorno would reject this approach, and for good reason. It risks a reification of the immediate that would undermine the further reflection required for consciousness and memory. Instead, these very impulses are, in a sense, the unconscious historical memory of the species. So, while they are "deep" in the constitution of individuals,

one cannot assume their existence without qualification. And, the ability to overcome them through reason and psychological factors is well established. We can dismiss this impulse, even in the case of our own suffering, through rationalizations and projections, as history shows. Yet, as developmental psychology, contemporary anecdotal evidence, as well as Adorno's anecdotal reflections upon childhood show, the ability to empathize with others is certainly still available as well.

Self-consciousness which is marked by the ability to reflect upon those impulses in such a way that one can feel guilt, the pull from one's self that that very self could be different is also in question. Again, Adorno's reflections on childhood show the possibility self-reflection remains, if only in moments of puzzlement with the adult world and the forms of mimicking play that children engage in. But, even in Adorno's more pessimistic moments he holds his foot in the door of possibility. In reflecting on the diremption of pleasure and joy from work, he points out that those who are privileged are still capable of a "cunning intertwining of pleasure and work," which "leaves real experience still open, under the pressure of society."[216] And, so long as memory and imagination in the relevant senses are still possible, self-consciousness in this sense is as well.

The social conditions in which the contemporary subject exists make memory, here understood as the ability to reflect on the concepts employed in understanding one's experience and thus connecting that experience to the species through those concepts, particularly problematic. For, this process of remembrance requires the ability to hold on to contradiction and the guilt provided by self-consciousness. As Adorno puts the problem, social pressures tend toward a weakening of memory through the effects of these pressures on consciousness: "The

[216] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 130.

effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all too alert consciousness that its weakness when confronted with the superior strength of unconscious processes." The ability to forget "immediately fits in well with the desire to get on with things. Whoever doesn't entertain any idle thoughts doesn't throw any wrenches into the machinery."[217]

Lastly, one can ask whether there exists a form of social life which develops the imagination as the ability to bring something new into the world. The objective conditions for imagination, then must allow for subjects to come to the realization that those very objective conditions are wrong. While one might think of the reflections on childhood play merely allow for a continuation of consciousness, I think it also implicates the subject's ability for memory in this specialized sense. For, in play and in the names of animals, children hold onto a utopian possibility that brings with it potential consciousness of contradiction and universals through which objective reality can be seen as wrong, a society in which individuals are valued, not for their exchangability, but in their difference, their particularity. The point here, is that while social forces, and they have taken on the force of objective powers, discourage the continuation of the sorts of imagination that are possible from the forms of play and expression still available to children, these forms of expression and play remain as positive forms of social life which make possible imagination in the sense required. Obviously, Adorno is pessimistic that this could take the form of a social movement. A political movement which emerged under current social conditions would be more likely to promote the regressive tendencies of those conditions than to attempt to overthrow them. The objective possibility of imagination in this sense, then is merely hope: the objective possibility of memory, confronted with the possibility of disaster and emerging, not unchanged, but as hope. And here, imagination's objective conditions are really

[217] Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 92.

the objective conditions of thought itself, which at this historical stage are the existence of subject and object. Since these cannot be reduced either one to the other or both to some third term, the potential for something new cannot be eliminated. The subject, as it is understood in idealism, posits itself. Fichte here is the true understanding of the consequences of idealism, and as such the potential for freedom, the potential "sublation of its own domination" will continue in the appearance of subjectivity as free self-creation. This makes possible the anticipation of freedom in the state of technical forces of production, though idealism distorts the form freedom would take.

> "The subject as productive imagination, pure apperception, ultimately as free action, enciphers that activity in which the life of people actually reproduces itself, and with good reason anticipates in it freedom. That is the reason why subject will hardly vanish into object or into anything else allegedly higher, into Being however it may be hypostatized. Subject in its self-positing is semblance and at the same time something historically exceedingly real. It contains the potential for the sublation of its own domination."[218]

Given these reflections on the possibility and characteristics of experience that can redeem certain historical potentials submerged in concepts, we can once again ask after the possibility of politics in the contemporary world. As the continuing phenomenon of nationalism illustrates there is little reason to hope that freedom as the realization of self-consciousness on a collective level, the formulation of ourselves as a species, is likely anytime soon. Faced then with the continuing irrationality of history, the position outlined above seems plagued by a serious problem. It is caught between a Hegelian position in which there is a logic of history, and which is guaranteed by the totality, by World Spirit's movement and eventual self-realization, and an irrationalism toward history in which it is either one damned thing after another, or what would be even worse, the continual deepening of the tragedy of enlightenment, in which the

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[218] Theodor Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 256.

possibilities of freedom as self-consciousness limp along in the wake of accumulating and avoidable suffering and domination. The position here cannot claim the existence of a totality of the sort which allows Hegel to avoid the problem of the seeming irrationality of history, nor can the position claim, like Kant, an ahistorical fact of human nature, unsocial sociability, that will bring about the realization of the species. Neither history nor nature can guarantee the rationality of history.

Adorno's position as explicated here cannot provide a categorical imperative of the sort advocated by Kant. It cannot provide a formula through which specific actions can be determined to be right or wrong, rational or irrational. It can provide, on the other hand, an account of the remaining sources of resistance, the places and constellations in which the possibility of a realized freedom and thus the possibility of morality and politics can be found. In doing so, it can also provide an account of failures and missed possibilities of history. This is perhaps contradictory. At once, the position of this chapter characterizes certain phenomena as tragic, as wrong, as to be avoided, yet it seems to also say that one cannot provide a ground from which these claims can be made. Even on the level of the individual, the position here locates a certain form of experience as something to be promoted: self-conscious experience in which memory and imagination are engaged in understanding suffering and its avoidability. Yet, it also seems to claim that history is on the brink of making these experiences impossible and that they do not and cannot come from unmediated nature. While the chapter runs through a procedure for mediating this problem conceptually, through the immediate experience of suffering and the constellation of key concepts, one cannot turn this procedure into a universal criterion for the rationality of experience. As one might expect from a negative dialectic, the procedure produces a negative orientation toward politics as it exists, a resistance without necessarily providing the

possibility of an alternative politics taking its place. Chapter 5 thus turns to the question of validity with regard to the constellative procedure and the sorts of experiences Adorno is calling for in the face of historical tragedy. This takes the form, first of a summary and refutation of Habermas' criticisms of Adorno, specifically with regard to the question of validity of the criteria that can be used to frame ethical subjectivity and a practical orientation toward the world.

Chapter 5 Criticisms of Adorno and the Validity of Experience

The aim of this chapter is to at once deal with prevalent objections to the way of proceeding in philosophy and with regard to practical reason in particular articulated in chapter 4 and to outline a way of understanding a conception of validity of experience through the concepts of orientation, interpretation, and expression. Both Adorno and Habermas are concerned with the possibility of meaning in a world marked by the dominance of instrumental reason, a world in which even the most intimate relationships are potentially instrumentalized through the ways in which they are inevitably mediated by society. Habermas, though, criticizes Adorno's attempt to demonstrate the possibility of meaning in the seemingly meaningless world because it relies on a conception of mimesis that is unsustainable. While Adorno does rely on a conception of mimesis, this concept is more complicated than a simple mimicking of an inanimate object of nature, an animal, or another conscious human being; the sort of identification captured in the notion of mimesis is neither a reason before reason nor a claim that to theorize meaning in the contemporary world requires a communicative relationship with such objects. These claims, and thus the rejection of Adorno's conception of mimesis ignore the relationship between mimesis and utopia. Mimesis, as mere identification with another, is not sufficient for theorizing the possibility of meaning in the instrumentalized world. Instead, non-identity thinking is also required, and it is through this sort of thinking that utopian possibilities are preserved. Our ability to immediately identify with the other is inevitably mediated by the societies we live in. Yet, this experience of identification is not reducible to a discursive relationship to the object identified with. Though language itself has a role in any mediation of experience by thought, neither the experience of identification nor the mediation of this experience in language captures the utopian moment of thought that Adorno wishes to preserve

in the mediation of identification by concepts such as freedom. While any articulation of the potentials that open up in the object through the subject's identification with it requires the use of concepts that can only be expressed in language, the moment of identification is not merely those concepts' linguistic articulation, nor can the conceptual mediation of this experience be completely described in language. That is, even though any articulation of the experience of mimesis and the non-identity between the object of identification and the concepts used to describe and understand the object takes place in language, there will always be a remainder that is unarticulated in a description of the experience of the object. But more than this, even the concepts themselves contain more than their expression in language. This is the case even when one orients oneself toward both the object and the concepts used to interpret the object in the spirit of openness, letting the object "speak for itself." And, in fact, this remainder is precisely why Adorno articulates the possibility of meaning as requiring an orientation toward the object in which one does not merely reduce the object to the linguistically articulated concepts that describe it. So, even the ideal of a humanity that expresses solidarity with all human beings through its self-constitution, an ideal that Adorno returns to over and over, is an expression of the possibility of meaning that remains inscribed in the objects. This ideal is merely an expression of the those possibilities' non-existence. In interpretation, which takes the form of constructing a constellation of concepts around the object, the resulting analysis aims at the expression of the potentials inscribed in the object through the articulation of those potentials' non-existence as contradictory with the concepts inscribed in the object. When Adorno relates the anecdote of a woman, who, having seen a dramatization of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, remarked, "Yes, but *that* girl at least should have been allowed to live," he at once rejects her response as "an alibi" for the totality of anti-Semitism and totalitarian tendencies remaining in Germany, but also describes

it as “good as first step toward understanding.”[219] This anecdote shows at once the tendency toward excusing the status quo as well as the possibility of overcoming it through the identification with the victims of oppression. The anecdote reveals a proto-experience, which provides the possibility of overcoming the orientation of the anti-Semite, who “is defined far more by his incapacity for any experience whatsoever, by his unreponsiveness.”[220] Here, the woman's potential experience is mediated by the prevailing anti-Semitism. To get at this mediation, mere identification with the individual victim is insufficient. The leap from the individual case of Anne Frank to a criticism of the fact of anti-Semitism requires the connection in experience from that case to the claim that everyone “should have been allowed to live,” a claim which brings out the conceptual potential within the experience of identification with Anne Frank. Her interpretation of experience is already mediated by concepts other than solidarity or equality, despite her proto-experience of identification with Anne Frank revealing an interpretation that contradicts the concepts of anti-Semitism. It is only with an eye toward the conceptual in addition to the notion of mere identification that the anecdote becomes a potential object of interpretation and further reveals the contradictions within existing reality.

The contradiction between reality and the potentials inscribed in the object of inquiry explains why Adorno's analysis takes the form it does and why in this form it must always appear contradictory. The sort of interpretation that Adorno articulates and which attempts to express the potentials within the objects takes this form because reality itself is contradictory. To get at this, Adorno seemingly exaggerates, though, in reality, he merely focuses on the extremes within existing reality. In doing so, he attempts, from within language, to break through the ways in

[219] Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 101.
[220] Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 101.

which language itself falsely resolves the contradictions in reality. But as I tried to show in chapter 4, this procedure of constellation works toward an orientation to reality in which the subject can interpret the world and even express that interpretation in language in such a way as to at least show that meaning remains a possibility, though one must guard against the possibility that even this sort of interpretation could be used to justify existing reality rather than show it up as contradictory. Adorno's procedure is designed to reveal the possibilities for meaning and thus utopia in the very objects, subjective experiences and actions that simultaneously enforce, embody, articulate our very oppression. But, to avoid merely resolving the contradictions in material reality as though they were merely contradictions in thought, Adorno's mode of expression attempts to keep both utopia and disaster in view. To do so, he attempts to show even the mode of expression proper to the contemporary world, the injunction to always make oneself understood, the claim that one's ideas are either communicable or meaningless, literally non-sense, is part and parcel of the world that reduces meaningful experience to a function within existing institutions and an excuse for the existing state of affairs. But, even within language, he finds the possibility of meaning. Otherwise, Habermas' criticism that Adorno is engaged in a performative contradiction would be a strike against Adorno's project. The contradictions in Adorno's thought would be vicious only if they are merely an artifact of his interpretation, rather than the mode of expression appropriate to a world which is itself contradictory. Rather, by proceeding in a way that appears contradictory, Adorno finds the very possibility of escaping the contradictions that he attempts to express. By spotting the tendency to reduce all language to mere communication, to a mere tool in the functioning of social systems that are beyond our control, Adorno can then find the counter-tendency, that, while all but extinguished, continues to provide the basis for thinking differently at all: language as expression. Even in *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, this counter-tendency takes the form of the name, which as the particular, shows up the concept as more than mere category for the classification of particulars, and so, reveals language as potentially more than what Adorno takes it to be at the beginning of the investigation.

Chapter 5, then, presents the objections mentioned above, that Adorno relies on an unsustainable conception of mimesis and that his procedure results in a performative contradiction and proceeds to a defense of Adorno which takes these objections seriously, yet finds that these objections largely miss their mark. More specifically, in this chapter I will address the question of the meaningfulness of experience through 3 sorts of objections that are made against Adorno's way of proceeding. The first two sorts of objections are made by Habermas, who claims to have redeemed whatever normative potentials are left from enlightenment reason after the tragedies of the twentieth century. The first sort of objection claims that Adorno's conception of reconciliation, of the overcoming of the problems of the history of reason, is dependent on mimesis, which is either a form of irrationalism or dependent on the unrealistic claim that we need to communicatively reconcile with nature. I address this claim by first, showing that Adorno does not advocate, nor could he, a return to nature of the sort that Habermas claims he does. Secondly, I deny the claim that reconciliation for Adorno must involve a communicative relationship to non-human nature. The second sort of objection presented by Habermas, goes to the heart of the question of meaning and validity. It claims that Adorno (and Horkheimer), are stuck in a paradox or performative contradiction with regard to their judgments regarding existing reality. In Habermas' interpretation of their work, they are engaged in a totalizing critique not only of existing reality, but of the very reason that might be used to critique existing reality. Thus, they are left with no rational basis for their critique. The

third sort of objection is brought most clearly by Albrecht Wellmer, who claims that the Adorno's critique requires a vision of utopia that is dependent on an unsustainable philosophy of history. Put differently, from Adorno's social theory, there is no everyday experience which can provide the basis for a principle of morality. As I will show, however, this objection is largely answered if one has a proper account of Adorno's use of mimesis and its relationship to utopia. As an interlude between Habermas' criticisms and Wellmer's, I want to address Axel Honneth's more recent attempts to redeem Adorno's work through the notions of physiognomy and imitative reason. This interpretation is promising, but I think too quickly moves from the sorts of experiences that Adorno does in fact rely on to a claim to reason and the grounding of norms. I want to show that each of these objections fails either in its interpretation of Adorno, its arguments against Adorno's views, or both. In doing so, I also want to articulate the way in which Adorno's position on experience can provide something approximating criteria for the validity of experience and thus judgment, though, because of its more modest claims for reason, these criteria do not make available a complete set of moral principles or decision procedure for determining absolutely the rationality of experience. Instead, drawing from the work in chapter 4 on self-conscious imagination and memory we are left with the notions of interpretation, expression, and orientation, which will always leave room for fallibility and revision.

Part I Adorno and Habermas

Adorno's negative dialectic has faced its most biting criticisms from those who claim his intellectual mantel. In particular, the criticism that he is unable to formulate a theory because his philosophical insights themselves undermine the possibility of theory, that is, the criticism of reason itself falls prey to the self-same criticism of reason, is quite widespread. The most influential critic holding this position is, of course, Jürgen Habermas. This criticism is most

famously and most thoroughly presented in Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and *The Theory of Communicative Action.* But, even earlier, in a talk given almost immediately following Adorno's death in 1969, Habermas attributes the following to "a young critic still sure of his Hegel": Adorno's assessment that "the totality of society is untrue" "would actually be a theory of the impossibility of theory."[221] Without the totality of Hegel's system as truth to provide a position from which the rest of history can be understood, toward which it history moves, one cannot provide meaning to the other moments in the movement of history. This is an abstract formulation of Habermas' later claim that Adorno and Horkheimer are caught in a performative contradiction. "If they do not want to renounce the effect of a final unmasking and still want to continue with critique, they will have to leave at least one rational criterion intact for their explanation of the corruption of all rational criterion."[222] This chapter, then, addresses itself to this question. Does Adorno's thought, as explicated in chapter 4, provide at least one rational criterion? Or, if it does not, what does it need to show in order to avoid falling into irrationalism?

All the targets of Habermas' criticism in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Derrida, Heidegger, Foucault, and the early Frankfurt School) are characterized as rejecting modernity along Nietszschian lines and because of this, all of these projects, including Horkheimer and Adorno's, ultimately fail because they cannot provide a rational criterion for the rejection of the *status quo*, that is, for their own normative claims and practical orientation. So

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[221] Jürgen Habermas, "Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity—Self-affirmation Gone Wild," in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983), 108.

[222] Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno," in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987), 126-7.

despite Adorno's attempts to in fact criticize given reality from within that reality, the norms from whence he does so are not available to him. For, "this normative content has to be acquired and justified from the rational potential inherent in everyday practice, if it is not to remain arbitrary."[223] While Habermas interprets his own project as capturing the rational aspects of mimesis, which "can be laid open only if we give up the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness—namely, a subject that represents objects and toils with them—in favor of the paradigm of linguistic philosophy—namely, that of intersubjective understanding of communication...,"[224] Habermas is also attempting to capture the normative potential of the other of reason in Adorno's work, the non-identical or non-identity thinking, through the reclaiming of the rational potentials implicit in the making of validity claims in lifeworld interactions. The reproduction of the subject who is capable of knowledge presupposes the realm of communicative rationality that is implicit in these lifeworld interactions. The use of language itself presupposes not purposive rationality, that is an instrumental orientation toward the objective world and a strategic orientation toward other human beings, but instead the ability to take up the position of the other in an interaction with the goal of mutual understanding. The purposive orientations of individuals presupposes the production of a subject capable of such an orientation, and this production of individuals presupposes the symbolic reproduction characteristic of the lifeworld in which people take up the position of the other(s) present in the interaction. Habermas thus claims that the "way out" of the performative contradiction implicit in the use of reason to criticize the devolution of reason into purely instrumental reason, into

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[223] Jürgen Habermas"The Normative Content of Modernity," in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987), 341.

[224] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action v. 1*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 390.

mere power, is the reorientation of the subject of reason toward its own basis in the intersubjective realm.

> "From this perspective, both cognitive-instrumental mastery of an objectified nature (and society) and narcissistically overinflated autonomy (in the sense of purposively rational self-assertion) are derivative moments that have been rendered independent from the communicative structures of the lifeworld, that is from the intersubjectivity of relationships of mutual understanding and relationships of reciprocal recognition."[225]

Both strategic rationality and instrumental rationality are fundamentally parasitic upon the norms implicit in symbolic reproduction of the species in the communicative rationality of the lifeworld.

From the perspective of Habermas' reorientation of critical theory, which Habermas seems to have come to, if not explicitly theorized, even as early as Adorno's death, Adorno's notion of reconcilliation can only be explicated as "the idea of maturity, of a life together in communication free from coercion."[226] For, the alternative to this understanding of reconcilliation, which Habermas characterizes as "the demand that nature open up its eyes, that in the condition of reconcilliation we talk with animals, plants, and rocks," is impossible because it assumes "a categorically different science and technology."[227] This categorically different science and technology is not possible, that is, there is no alternative to the instrumental orientation of human beings toward nature. And so, while Adorno links the domination of human beings by other human beings with human beings' domination of nature, Habermas

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[225] Jürgen Habermas, "An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative v. Subject-Centered Reason," *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987), 315.

[226] Habermas, "Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity—Self-affirmation Gone Wild," *Philosophical-Political* Profiles, 107.

[227] Habermas, "Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity—Self-affirmation Gone Wild," *Philosophical-Political* Profiles, 107.

attempts to split these forms of domination from each other, and in doing so locate a rational criterion for the liberation of human beings, the counter-factual norms of an ideal speech situation, which only calls into question domination that does not depend on the simultaneous liberation of nature from human beings. For Habermas, this division between the domination of nature and the domination of human beings and thus the cleaving of the liberation of human beings from the liberation of nature is the only way to preserve "the hope of someday arriving at a right and just reality," a hope that, according to Habermas, "Negative Dialectics gives up."[228]

I want to address Habermas' criticism and attempt to capture the normative potentials of Adorno's philosophy along two lines. First, I will address Habermas' characterization of mimesis as requiring a fundamentally different kind of science, or briefly that Adorno's notion of reconcilliation requires that we "talk to minerals." Second, I will deal with what can briefly be called the accusation that Adorno is caught up in a performative contradiction. In addressing these criticisms, I will show that Adorno's project, while depending on a notion of mimesis and while seemingly contradictory, in fact provides a way of proceeding in which both the problems and possibilities of subjectivity and meaning are laid bare.

Section I. Talking to Minerals?

As I merely mentioned above, when Habermas presents his theory of communicative action, one aspect of that presentation is its attempt to capture the rational grounds implicit in Adorno's notion of mimesis. But Habermas, in fact, must also be attempting to get at the non-identical, or the aspect of the object that is eviscerated and ignored in a closed conceptual

[228]Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action v. 1*, 452, fn 28. Here he is of the odd opinion that Adorno's later work gives up on any "dialectical grasp of the non-identical." He then proceeds to primarily depend on quotations from Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*, which is both an early work and one in which Horkheimer is obviously simplifying some key ideas from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. So, it is unclear how Habermas thinks this is the case with *Negative Dialectics.*

system. It is partly by ignoring this aspect of Adorno's thought that Habermas can characterize Adorno's notion of reconciliation as literally requiring the communicative interaction of the species with non-human nature. It seems that Habermas has in mind something like a return to a pre-rationalized relationship to nature, in which human beings mimic nature rather than dominate it. This is why he can characterize Adorno and Horkheimer as searching for a "reason before reason,"[229] to ground their criticism of contemporary society. Since even this "reason before reason" would be marred by its origins in an instrumental orientation toward nature, they can only "nominate a capacity, mimesis, about which they can speak only as they would about a piece of uncomprended nature."[230] This misunderstands Adorno's notion of mimesis in two ways. First, Adorno could not be more against a "return to nature." Second, mimesis, all by itself, is not a normative grounding for criticism. It provides for a descriptive account of the evolution of reason itself; the assertions of reason, are in fact based on its non-identical other, accessed through a mimetic element in thought, which as identity thinking, it denies reality to.

With regard to the first point, as a merely interpretive matter, the places in which Adorno defends reason against irrationalism, a return to nature, relativism, and such-like ideas are almost too numerous to count. In his *Hegel: Three Studies*, which he characterizes as a preparation for *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains approvingly that Hegel's philosophy understands that

> "the reified, rationalized society of the bourgiose era, the society in which nature-dominating reason had come to fruition, could become a society worthy of human beings—*not by regressing to older, irrational stages prior to the division of labor* but only by applying its rationality to itself, in other words, only in a healing awareness of the marks of unreason in its own reason, and the traces of the rational in the irrational as well [emphasis mine]."[231]

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[229] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action v. 1*, 382.

[230] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action v. 1*, 382.

[231] Theodor Adorno, "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy," in *Hegel:Three Studies*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans., (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993),74.

In other words, while reason has retained elements of myth or unreason or as chapter 4 formulates it, nature, and defended those remaining elements as reason, it is only by using reason that this unreason can be overcome. As Adorno puts it more succinctly, "Only reason, the principle of societal domination inverted into the subject, would be capable of abolishing this domination."[232] This could not be a matter of forgetting the technological progress made through reason as it now exists. Instead, Adorno is after the recognition that nature, that is, unreason, continues to exist under the guise of reason, and reason, in its present guise, obscures the rational potential that remains in nature. This recognition occurs through the notion of experience as self-conscious imagination and memory, unpacked through the constellation of concepts as spelled out in chapter 4. In other words, reason as it exists, as the universal concepts that have passed down to us, for example, freedom must be employed in a constellation around the object that is being investigated, even if there is also an element of mimetic identification with the object. In his claim that Adorno is after a reason before reason, the ability to talk to minerals, Habermas does not account for the relation between mimesis and non-identity thinking. And this leads into the second point against Habermas' interpretation.

A suggestion by Jay Bernstein offers a way into this second point. Bernstein points out that the targets of Habermas' criticism in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* are indeed attempting to get at something that lies outside of reason, at least in part. This claim is embedded in a larger argument that philosophical modernity is itself a latter day attempt similar to the earlier attempt by artistic modernists to give voice to the non-conceptual. This larger argument need not be summarized here. But, in advancing this larger argument, Bernstein provides at least one reason why Adorno's non-identical is still relevant after Habermas'

[232]Adorno, "Progress," 152.

communicative turn: a reflexivity absent in monological conceptions of reason.

Bernstein, in claiming that modernist philosophy comes late to the lessons of artistic modernism, argues that Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* advances the project of modernism through "the elaboration of of the interconnection of three elements: local reason and rationality, sensual particularity (non-identity, alterity, otherness, the body), and judgement."[233] For Bernstein, the movement of modernist art toward reflection on its own forms is mirrored in philosophy's (belated) turn toward reflection on its own exclusions. In particular, Adorno rejects the great philosophical systems, those of Hegel and Kant in particular, in part, on the grounds of their conceptual closure. That is, the role of philosophy, at least in part, must be the reflection on what is lost in the very concepts it must use to understand the world. And in fact, Adorno goes further. The concepts of philosophy are dependent on what those very concepts exclude. In excluding mimetic elements, reason carries elements of nature along with it. In our emergence as a species with reason, and too, as individuals capable of reason, we bring along with us the irrational and proto-rational, but couched in rationality. As was shown in chapter 4, this is relevant for understanding Adorno's thought in two ways. First, reason, while remaining irrational, continues to claim complete rationality, and this is the conceptual closure that Bernstein points out is unaccounted for in Habermas' interpretation. In the terms of chapter 4, reason as it exists is a forgetting, hence the necessity of memory. And second, there remain rational elements in that which reason disclaims. Here, the necessity of imagination in experience reemerges. The imaginative projection and identification with the other, especially as that other that excluded by existing reason is necessary for reconciliation. Thus, the conclusion of chapter 4: history is to be

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[233] J. M. Bernstein, "The Causality of Fate: Modernity and Modernism in Habermas," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity,* ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997), 254.

found in those elements shunted into nature by existing reason, and nature is to be found in what reason, or history, takes itself to be. Or, to put this in terms of the discussion of mimesis, mimesis is an element of reason that has been disclaimed by reason, shunted into nature, and the recognition of which is required for the critique of existing reason. We can see this in key passages in *Negative Dialectics*.

There, Adorno uses the word "mimesis" a mere five times. It is worthwhile to examine the most characteristic passage. This passage offers three key ideas for replying to Habermas' criticism. In this passage, a part of which was interpreted in chapter 4, not only is it clear that, first, the role of mimesis is to make us aware of the non-identical in application of concepts to particulars, the reason that has been shunted into nature, but also, second, that a regression to knowledge as mere mimesis would not be knowledge at all. And third, as Adorno puts it below, "this awareness grows untrue when the affinity—indelible, yet infinitely removed at the same time—is posited as positive."

"For the sake of Utopia, identification is reflected in the linguistic use of the word outside of logic, in which we speak, not of identifying an object(Objekt), but of identifying with people and things (Dingen). Dialectics alone might settle the Greek argument whether like is known by like or unlike. If the thesis that likeness alone has that capacity makes us aware of the indelible mimetic element in all cognition and human practice, this awareness grows untrue when the affinity—indelible, yet infinitely removed at the same time—is posited as positive. In epistemology, the inevitable result is the false conclusion that the object is the subject. Traditional philosophy believes that it knows the unlike by likening it to itself, while in so doing it really knows itself only. The idea of changed philosophy would be to become aware of likeness by defining it as that which is unlike itself. The nonidentical element in an identifying judgment is clearly intelligible insofar as every single object subsumed under a class has definitions not contained in the definition of the class. But to a more emphatic concept, to one that is not simply the characteristic unit of the individual objects from which it was abstracted, the opposite applies as well. Emphatically conceived, the judgment that a man is free refers to the concept of freedom; but this concept in turn is more than is predicated of the man, and by other definitions the man is more than the concept of his freedom. The concept says not only that it is applicable to all individuals defined as free; it feeds on the idea of condition in which individuals would have qualities not to be ascribed to anyone here and now. The specific praising a man as free is the *sous-entendu* that something impossible is ascribed to him because it shows in him. This quality, striking and secret at the same time, animates every identifying

judgment that is worth making."[234]

Here Adorno takes the experience of identification. Despite everything, human beings are still capable of the experience of identifying with another human being, and more than that, even with objects. This is an element of the subjective capability of self-consciousness I explicated in chapter 4. In part, he then proceeds to show that this identification is dependent on the non-identical. Identifying with another is dependent on that thing not being the same as that which identifies with it. In "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy," Adorno does in fact make the claim that there must be a commonality between the subject and object of knowledge, for without it, the subject would know only itself, and in fact, this is his claim against the goals of positivism. But, again, knowledge also cannot be reduced to mimesis, as Habermas interprets Adorno as claiming. In addition to mimesis, this affinity between the subject and object of knowledge, the ability of the subject to identify with an object and the commensurability of the object with the subject's means for understanding it, Adorno is calling for a two-sided reflection. First, mimesis, identification with the object, makes us aware of the non-identical in all rationally identifying judgments. Mimesis, as the experience of identification by the individual is a stand-in for species, the evolution of reason, and what was lost in it, but that makes us feel the need for the meta-theoretical claim that the identification of the object with its concepts requires the nonidentical in the object. In the example of freedom as applied to human beings above, mimesis, identification with a particular human being grants us the experience of the individual human being as more than the concept freedom predicates of the human being. But, the non-identity between object and concept adds a key element. That is, in the second place, the concept contains potentials that transcend the object to which it is applied. In the example above, the

[234]Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*,150-1.

concept of freedom as applied to the particular human being implies possibilities that are not available given the social conditions in which that human being exists. Thus, the concept of freedom indicts those social conditions. So, the momentary assumption of identity between concept and particular is necessary for judgment. For, only if the human being has indications of that concept of freedom can the immanent critique hold. If it simply were not possible for human beings to be free in a sense beyond the formal freedom of the exchange society, there would be no sense in claiming that current conditions are unfree. Mimesis names the experience that something is lost in judgment and prompts a way to get at what that identification assumes, the non-identical, which ultimately provides a basis for criticizing existing states of affairs immanently. But, to be clear, experience, in addition to mimesis, requires reflection on the difference between the particular that is identified in a judgment and the concept that is supposed to describe the particular. This is how Adorno can characterize identification, not in the sense of A=B, as in logic, but rather as the subjective ability to identify with another, as remaining "for the sake of utopia." And it is through the notion a self-conscious memory and imagination outlined in chapter 4, a bringing into play of the relevant concepts, that can make this experience one worthy of the name, one that points toward something different, and thus utopian.

Just as Deborah Cook argues[235], mimesis in the false world is not sufficient. One cannot merely non-conceptually identify with the object. Without the thought of utopia, the ways in which the objects fail to reach their concepts, the ways in which particulars do not even reach the concept of freedom as it already exists, for example, mimesis cannot capture non-identity of object with concept, of particular with universal. And this is the fundamental problem with Habermas' criticism. Adorno is not calling for a return to simple mimesis with nature, but

[235]Deborah Cook, "From the Actual to the Possible: Nonidentity Thinking," Constellations 12, no. 1 (2005): 21-35. In particular, see, 31-2.

instead attempts to redeem what is lost from thinking when these objects are thought to exist as mere samples of concepts, when all relevant properties of an object are thought to be captured by a concept without a remainder. And this attempt requires both a mimetic experience, an identification of some sort with the object of inquiry and the subsequent engagement with the object in which relevant concepts enable an interpretation of the object and an expression of the meaning of the phenomena in question. This process is detailed in chapter 4.

This means that Habermas' interpretation of Adorno as merely calling for a mimetic relationship to nature as the alternative to the devolution of reason into instrumental rationality is not accurate. Adorno's conception of mimesis, as outlined above, does not require talking to minerals, but an orientation of engagement toward the object of inquiry. In this way, the rational potentials that are all but lost in the historical evolution of reason, and which are obscured in the turn to communication as the basis of a practical orientation, become available. By orienting oneself to the object of inquiry in this way, an aspect of experience, which is mediated by concepts, but not reducible to communication becomes possible. A model of this orientation is provided in chapter 4 through Adorno's claim that philosophy ought to become interpretation, in particular, that philosophy ought to take the historical as a cipher for the natural and the natural as a symbol for the historical. This discussion of mimesis also goes some way in explaining Adorno's mode of expression and its seeming contradictions. The immediate, the irrational, the natural, is to be investigated, interpreted as a way into the irrationality of existing reality and at the same time as a way to show the possibility of redemption through rational interpretation from within the irrational.

Section II. Performative Contradiction?

Habermas' Criticism

In the chapter specifically dealing with Horkheimer and Adorno in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* Habermas characterizes them as falling into a paradox with regard to the possibility of theory. As was mentioned above, he had already at the time of Adorno's death put this claim into the mouth of a "a young critic still sure of his Hegel." In the later work, he variously refers to the problem as a paradox and a performative contradiction. In Habermasian terms, Horkheimer and Adorno fail to distinguish between the quasi-transcendental norms implicit in communicative competence and linguistic reproduction and the empirical reality which may or may not live up to those norms. This analysis depends on a particular interpretation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

Habermas claims that Adorno and Horkheimer are radicalizing ideology critique, that is, turning ideology critique against itself. In this understanding, ideology critique simply means holding up to empirical reality the norms which it claims for itself, and so indicting empirical reality based upon its own norms. The radicalization of ideology critique, then, takes the norms of ideology critique and applies them to ideology critique itself. In Habermas' understanding, ideology critique is an unmasking of reason as power. That is, the universal claim of a norm is shown to actually be the assertion of power by some particular group. So, if we apply this to ideology critique itself, we have what Habermas calls the critique of instrumental reason, in other words, the claim that the reason that we use in ideology critique, because of its entwinement with power, is corrupted in the same fashion as the empirical reality it seeks to reveal as contradictory. The result:

"The suspicion of ideology becomes *total*, but without any change of direction. It is turned not only against the irrational function of bourgeois ideals, but against the rational potential of bourgeois culture itself, and thus reaches into the foundations of any ideology critique that proceeds immanently."[236]

[236]Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor

In unmasking—as Habermas calls it—the elements of domination within ideology critique, Horkheimer and Adorno undermine the very norms they invoke in their unmasking of the critique of ideology. This is the problem that Habermas variously refers to as paradox and performative contradiction.

As performative contradiction, Habermas is claiming that Horkheimer and Adorno must appeal to norms that are not available to them since, apparently, even the norms that would be used in criticizing instrumental reason are themselves corrupted by power. As paradox, if Horkheimer and Adorno are right, then they are wrong and if they are wrong, they are right. Unpacked, if all reason is entwined with power, then the rational norms which allow for this claim are themselves entwined with power, and thus just as questionable as the instrumental reason which is being critiqued: if they are right that the victory of instrumental reason is total, then they cannot make this critique. On the other side, if they claim a rational criteria for criticizing the total reversion of reason to mere instrumental reason, they must some how be outside of that reversion: the critique can only be true if it is false. From this reduction of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to a critique of instrumental reason understood as the radicalization of the critique of ideology, Habermas then derives the necessity of turning to an alternative paradigm, the paradigm of communicative action, in which rational norms can be located outside of the vagaries of reason's involvement with power. As outlined above, Habermas has other grounds for his account of the practical discourse and the norms generated therein, but in the context of his criticism of Adorno, he is claiming that his turning to the communicative paradigm is the only way to provide quasi-foundational norms from which one can then criticize the actual entwinement of reason with power and offer an alternative,

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Adorno," 119.

which takes the form of the coercion free participation of all those affected in a discourse regarding what norms are to be acted upon.

Habermas, then, aims to provide the grounds for proceeding immanently in a critique of the entwinement of reason with power, the grounds for arguing that a particular institutionalization of norms does not in fact meet those norms. In this way, he can also claim to be reconstructing the Marxist critique of liberalism. For example, the claim that only certain people are to be allowed a say in the public sphere, in the democratic formation of wills, is to be rejected on the grounds that this very process presupposes, at least counter-factually, the participation of all those concerned. The counter-factual presuppositions of argumentation in practical discourse imply the ability of all those concerned to consent to or dissent from the particular norm that is to be taken as a principle of action. Habermas, then, is attempting to show the potentials of reason that have yet to be institutionalized sufficiently, yet remain available both to the interlocutor in everyday interaction and to the theorist who attempts to reconstruct these everyday interactions with practical intent, since for both the discourse surrounding practical norms inevitably assumes a concept of argumentation that provides the criteria for engaging in argumentation at all.

Adorno, on the other hand, is attempting to get the potentials that are embedded in our everyday engagement with the world, but in a such a way that cannot be reduced to the conditions for discourse. To get at this, I offer a partial reinterpretation of sections of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which focuses on the centrality of the concept, and thus reiterates the place of nonidentical thinking in Adorno's thought. Non-identity thinking legitimates the critical stance toward the particular manifestations and entwinements of that reason with social reality, and contra Habermas's claims about Adorno, does so through an engagement with everyday

experience. In other words, while chapter 4 offers a way to bring into view the relationship between the body and its aversion to suffering and the concepts that human beings have developed in their social evolution in such a way that experience of a certain sort provides practical insight into existing reality, here I want to deal explicitly with the question of how Adorno can account for the possibility of this experience and the potential for meaning that comes from this sort of experience. In doing so, I provide an answer to the claim that Adorno is caught in a performative contradiction. The approach below develops Adorno's approach in two directions. First, through an interpretation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I show that Adorno does not claim that enlightenment is the one-sided victory of instrumental reason, which is a crucial aspect of Habermas' criticism. Rather, as can be seen from the analysis of language in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, enlightenment is from the start a contradictory process. This should be obvious even from a basic understanding of the theme of the text: enlightenment, in its very attempts to overcome myth becomes itself myth. Implicit in this claim about enlightenment is that the attempt to overcome irrationality through reason has, in its actual historical development, discarded elements that are rational while holding fast to elements of the irrationality it attempts to overcome. Second, through a development of Adorno's later responses to accusation of contradiction, I show why Adorno's thought appears contradictory, yet the form of this appearance is appropriate for understanding a world in which contradiction persists.

Language and Enlightenment

As a first step in reinterpreting *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it must be noted that from the beginning, even in the preface, Horkheimer and Adorno spell out that terms like enlightenment and truth will be used equivocally. “Both these terms, enlightenment and truth, are to be

understood as pertaining not merely to intellectual history but also to current reality."[237] This already opens the possibility of enlightenment's redemption, that is, its escape from its own origins in myth. Horkheimer and Adorno, base the reversion of enlightenment into myth upon the origins of enlightenment in mythology, which as the assertion of power over nature and thus over the human being's own internal nature, is also domination. Habermas is certainly right that this claim is made in the text. But, as was already made clear above, the answer for Adorno is not a return to nature through mimesis of nature, but rather an extension of enlightenment. For, enlightenment is ambiguous. It contains both the principle of domination, the reduction of reason to self-preservation, what Habermas calls reason becoming merely instrumental reason, but also "the prospect of its own alleviation."[238] The first section of Dialectic of Enlightenment, "The Concept of Enlightenment," which, incidentally, Habermas largely ignores in his interpretation, attempts to keep open this possibility immanently, through reflection on enlightenment. In this section, Adorno and Horkheimer offer a reflection on the fate of language. A failure to read this section closely results in two potential misunderstandings. The first is Habermas' failing. One could read this as the claim that enlightenment, through the development of language from a "cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar" through the nominalism of positivism and radical empiricism, merely advances the project of conquering the unknown, in Habermas' terminology, the advance of merely instrumental reason. The second is that in invoking the Jewish ban on naming God, they must be appealing to a pseudo-messianic notion of redemption and thus a totally implausible philosophy of history. This is the interpretation that Albrecht Wellmer offers and will be answered after the explication of the account of language in

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[237] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi.
[238] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 32.

Dialectic of Enlightenment.

This interpretation of language answers to the claim from Habermas[239] mentioned above that critical theory must be based in intermundane experience or become arbitrary. This account of language gets at, in focusing on the name, an experience that remains in touch with the devolution of reason into mere instrumental reason, yet is something different than it. The use of this prohibition on the use of the name of God captures the possibility of the concept going beyond the particulars it is supposed to be abstracted from in nominalism. And the particular, the proper name, implies the uniqueness of the individual that is lost in judgment which invokes the concept of that thing. Already then, one can see the intermundane experience that Adorno is attempting to locate, not only in contemporary experience, but in the history of conceptual thought itself, the potentials for resistance. And here in the name, is at least one source of resistance. And it is asserted both as an articulation of experience and as a derivation of the necessity of the concept as something beyond the arbitrary assigning of names, something that attempts to go beyond what the rejection of metaphysics would make the name. "In this way, the moment of rationality in domination also asserts itself as something different from it."[240] The account of language, while taking the form of an historical account is actually an analysis of reason, the division of labor, and the potentials that remain within conceptual language.

Horkheimer and Adorno divide their analysis of language into three stages: language as image, language as symbol, and language as sign. The first corresponds roughly to the use of language as magic and mimetic representation of nature, as a pre-animistic cry of terror in the face of nature, in which the name is the thing, before the split between subject and object, before the split between good and evil, before the split between nature and culture. But, and this cannot

[239] Habermas, "The Normative Content of Modernity," 341.
[240] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 28.

be emphasized enough, this is not the point to which Adorno wishes us to return, for "magic is bloody untruth..."[241] The second stage, the point at which language "first enters history," corresponds roughly to myth and the domination implicit in the control of language by proto-intellectuals in the division of labor, priests and sorcerers. Here, language is both the thing and not the thing that it names, it is at once the correspondence to thing it names, but also stands in for that thing. And it is this dual-nature that provides the first inklings of the ability for immanent critique, the use of the concept against it's particular application to objects. "The concept, usually defined as as the unity of the features it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. This was the primal form of the objectifying definition, in which concept and thing became separate."[242] Here there is an obvious reference to Hegel's analysis of the indexicals in which sense-certainty is established and overcome. In Hegel, the assertion of "this" or "now" already assumes a universal experience of being which supercedes the sense-certainty of empiricism. Indexicals are only what they are by becoming what they are not; "this" can take on its role as an indexical only by being more than the particular "this" used at a specific time and place. For Hegel, even animals understand the falsity of sense-certainty, in that "they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up."[243] Just as the indexical shows the gap between the particular and the universal, language as symbol opens the gap between the word and the thing it names. But Adorno and Horkheimer link this

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[241] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 6.

[242] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 11.

[243] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 65.

second stage to fear and the acquisition of knowledge, which already asserts itself as the overcoming of fear. This second stage links linguistic expression to symbolic representation of the natural world. But, already, as a part of the social world, it emerges in its particularities as a function of the division of labor, that is, as influenced by power. Now, this is not the same as Habermas' claim that reason is merely power in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but rather, the claim that reason is entwined with power, a claim that he can agree to, and which he attempts to capture through the idea that in contemporary societies, the sources of pathology are the sites in which the system colonizes the lifeworld. Language, "when it first enters history" is at the behest of those who control language in the division of labor, those who are responsible for directing the (symbolic) interaction between non-physical nature, the *mana* in Horkheimer and Adorno's language, and the society in which they exist, and thus those who control language are also responsible for directing the symbolic reproduction of the society itself, the terms of social interaction within the society. Through this process of the symbolization, differentiation, and solidification of the undifferentiated *mana*, the whole of nature is turned into a social creation, and thus amenable to human control in the first place. But more than this, the social forces through which nature is made social come to be seen as themselves natural rather than a product of human labor, language, and consciousness. In this process of the control of *mana*, the individuals responsible for the physical labor of the community are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the social hierarchy is turned into something natural or given.

All along the way in this quasi-evolutionary account of language, Horkheimer and Adorno do not merely reject enlightenment on the grounds of its emergence from the desire for self-preservation, its emergence from the tendency to take our own intercourse with nature and among ourselves under our control. They also attempt to preserve mimesis from the first stage,

but not in an undifferentiated, unmediated form. That is, they do uncover mimesis as a lost, or nearly lost aspect of the evolution of reason; there remain elements of reason in what has been cast away in the social evolution of reason. Through the division of labor, emphasized in the second stage, which allows for one proto-class to represent its particular claims as universal as well as natural, we get the third stage of language, mediated by monotheism, in which we finally get the concept as universal. So, what emerges historically, through the transformation of mimesis into symbolic control of nature and other human beings, and finally, the emergence of the universal concept, is the possibility of the universal concept being turned against its applications to particulars. This interpretation is consistent with the account of mimesis given above that brings the constellative method and the notion of experience into play. Concepts from Adorno's later work offer a way to explicate the account of language given in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But, even in this earlier work, a version of Adorno's constellative method and the immanent critique of existing societies is captured in the Judaic ban on naming the universal, god. The universal must be the true universal, not the particular interests of a particular class posing as the universal through that class' ability to control the presentation of those particular interests in language. That is until we reach the radical nominalism of positivism, which in calling the universal a mere place-holder, makes the relation to the particular arbitrary and thus removes the ground for any dialectical engagement between the subject and object of knowledge. So in both the earlier, second stage of language as symbol, and the third stage of language as sign, the possibility of resistance to the justifications given for the division of labor as it stands is present, so long as the difference between the universal and particular can be recognized and articulated. For, even at the second stage, the word is both the thing it represents and not that thing, but something different, that is, a word. Then, in the third stage, the ban on the application

of the name of god to false gods is a metaphorical presentation of the potentials of resistance preserved in the universal concept and this naming process offers a model for understanding the question of validity.

Horkheimer and Adorno take their cue here from the Hegelian dialectic, though absent Hegel's dependence on the totality to provide the meaning and place for each moment in the dialectic. But, they refer to the process by which the truth can be redeemed from falsehood as "determinate negation," just as Hegel does. This is a rudimentary form of the process of constructing a constellation of concepts around a particular. This process of constructing a constellation is detailed in chapter 4. As we saw there, what is required is an engagement with the particular phenomenon to be interpreted in which both the bodily aversion to suffering and the relevant concepts are brought into a constellation around the object of investigation, and through which one can come to an interpretation. In this way, the critique of existing reality is always to remain immanent. There is no possibility of a critique from the outside of the social reality in which we exist; for, there is no outside. And this is why the question of the validity of judgments cannot be reduced to a mere procedure. For, the engagement with the particular through which the appropriate concepts can be brought to bear will always involve an element of subjective expression.

So, what Adorno offers is not a procedure for adjudicating the acceptability of norms in a practical discourse. Rather, the account of the evolution of concepts from their origins in magic through the ban on naming god, offers a way to get at the rational potentials sedimented in the evolution of the species. Indeed, even in the culture industry chapter, Adorno points out the rational potential in names and the process of naming, which, while coming under the control of the culture industry, still provides a source of resistance. So, while in some phrases, like "this is

the Hitler youth speaking," "the last bond between sedimented experience and language...is severed," the act of naming remains beyond the totalizing influence of the culture industry.[244] In this way, Adorno's thought shows that even the culture industry's use of language provides a place for expression. The orientation of the subject toward an object must be open, and this is captured in the notion of mimesis as it was explicated above. And naming, in particular the name of god as a model, captures the particularity, the uniqueness of the particular that cannot be superceded in any interpretation. But, more than this, the subject must engage in expression, not only in the sense of a subjective articulation of the self, but also in an expression of the conceptual history of the species which together with merely subjective expression results in an interpretation of the object.

What makes such an expression adequate to the object can be judged, not through the ability of the interpretation to be embraced by all those affected, nor by whether it engages norms that could be so accepted, but rather the subjective orientation to the object, that is, whether the object is adequately taken into account and subsequently, whether the expression engages the concepts that are relevant to understanding the object of inquiry. This picture provides, then, an account of something like validity, but not an account that can provide a procedure for determining the validity of experience or interpretation. Instead, what I take to have shown is that while Adorno cannot provide these criteria, he does not give up on the rational potentials of existing societies, and those which are to be found in the reconstruction of everyday experiences. While he is pessimistic in the main, this is a methodological commitment that offers a way into the deeply sedimented rationality of even the seemingly most irrational society, while proceeding in such a way that the sources of domination, whether of human beings or non-human nature, are

[244] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 135.

clearly revealed. And, yet, it seems the potentials to overcome domination go very deep indeed, down to the origin of names and the subjective ability to identify with an object, whether that object is one's own history, another subject, or even an inanimate object.

Adorno's Reply to the Charge of Contradiction

To take this reply to the charge of performative contradiction further, it is worthwhile to examine Adorno's own response to the claim that he is engaged in a paradoxical enterprise, or that his position is self-contradictory. In the discussion that followed Adorno's talk,"The Meaning of Working Through the Past," he articulates two key ideas for understanding the question of justification and the charge of performative contradiction. First, note that exaggeration in theory, the cause of plenty of the seeming contradictions in his thought, is a necessary form of thought in the contemporary world. For, it reveals what underlies the appearances and disclaiming that goes on to this day.

> [I]n consideration of the by no means optimistic overall picture that I gave, that I perhaps exaggerated and this exaggeration seems to me to be a necessary medium for social-theoretical and philosophical presentation, because the moderate, normal surface existence in general conceals such potentials and because in the face of neutral, average everydayness to indicate the threat lying below it at first blush always has the character of exaggeration.[245]

The claim that Adorno's project is contradictory, then, misses something crucial about our ability to theorize a contradictory world. If we assume with Adorno, that language itself has not been left untouched by a reality in which contradictions abound, we can conclude that language too will be involved in justifying, perpetuating, and covering over these contradictions. Adorno thus justifies his mode of presentation, his mode of presenting seeming exaggerations, by pointing out that to be critical of existing reality, in which the extremes are covered over and thus seemingly

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[245] Theodor Adorno, "Discussion of Professor Adorno's Lecture 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, Appendix I, trans. Henry Pickford, (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 305-6.

eliminated, one's analysis will always appear contradictory at first glance. The truth about existing reality, however, is to be found in these very extremes. In this way Adorno reveals the underlying tendencies of societies, in for example, the concept of nationalism as outlined in chapter 4. Only by understanding the extremes, can one gain an accurate view of a supposedly neutral or harmless patriotism.

And, second, in reply to the question of whether in the face of totalitarian potentials in society, one should emphasize the ideal of justice, Adorno emphasizes that to a certain degree, the immanent critique of racist politics needs to take up the concept of justice, for that concept brings into play the relationship of the collective to the individual's interests. But, and here is the bulk of Adorno's answer, to bring justice into play may just play into the hands of the totalitarian or racist.

> "But at this point I would like to say something that will perhaps surprise you, after I've spoken so much about enlightenment. For I don't know whether one doesn't end up in a hopeless position when one goes into these things in the discussion, for instance, to say that certainly it really is an absolute norm that no one should be killed, but in war people are killed, and there do exist exceptional situations—which norm, which ethical law contains the ultimate justification for them? I think when one gets involved in, I would like to say, adolescent discussions, in such infantile discussions, where the most drastic things are at issue, when one right away asks about the stars and the absolutely ultimate values, then one is already in the devil's kitchen, and I think in answer to this a certain minimum amount of enlightenment suffices, namely, when one simply says, listen, whether one should murder people or not murder people, that's something I won't discuss, that is a vulgarity I cannot abide—that this is basically also philosophically the higher standpoint, rather than if one were to derive from a system of ethics, first, second, and third volume, that is general, specific, and very specific parts, that one should not murder the Jews. I mean to get involved in a theoretical discussions about whether people should be tortured or not, let's rather stop that. I think that then certainly in a higher sense breaking off rationality at such places better serves reason than a kind of pseudo-rationality that erects systems where it is first and foremost a question of immediate reaction."[246]

In everyday practice, then, the appeal to a first ethical principle would already admit the possibility of either its violation or the qualification that under certain circumstances, torture is

[246] Adorno, "Discussion of Professor Adorno's Lecture 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past," 304.

acceptable. Adorno here takes a stand toward such questions similar to the sort of stand that Wittgenstein takes toward the global epistemological skeptic: we ought to avoid engagement with such questions in language which already admits the possibility of on the one hand, skepticism regarding all knowledge, and on the other the possibility of torture as a just or ethical way of proceeding. As he puts it in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*, to engage in such discussion already claims for reason a realm that is at least partly beyond reason, that is, the immediate reaction to the suffering of another.[247] In the terms of *Negative Dialectics*, the attempt to derive a rational principle which would outlaw torture already lets the defender of torture in the door. That is, it is already on the ground in which torture will be found to be acceptable under certain conditions. Note, too, the connection with the discussion of mimesis. Adorno there states that the truth of mimesis as identification, that our affinity with the other is the pre-condition of all rational knowledge of the other, but that to thus reduce knowledge to the object's affinity with the subject of knowledge makes the claim untrue, in other words, it risks the reduction of the object to the categories of the subject, which is precisely what happens in discussions of torture. The potential object of torture is always reduced to the category of terrorist with knowledge that could prevent innocents from being killed. And thus, no discussion that claims the absolute resolution of the problem in terms of rational judgment can avoid the elimination of the impulse against suffering, the dismissal of the very conditions for the discussants' knowledge of the object, their affinity with him or her.

It is not paradoxical to claim that the world is irrational and that we possess possibilities for overcoming this irrationality or even that these possibilities are deposited in the evolution of irrational institutions and concepts. While this sort of claim may require a unique and seeming

[247] Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 112-9.

contradictory mode of expression, it does not require that one resort to irrationalism or an emotivism of a Humean sort in order to explain the possibility of a practical and meaningful orientation toward the world. For it is clear, not only from Adorno's thought, but even from the most behaviorist psychology, that reason cannot operate in the absence of emotion.

Part II Honneth and Wellmer

Section I Honneth's Attempt to Redeem Adorno's Thinking

Axel Honneth, who earlier in his career held to the Habermasian interpretation outlined above, has recently argued that this is not adequate to Adorno's theory and that to understand Adorno's social theory, we must look at it not as an explanatory sociology, but as a physiognomy of a failed form of life.[248] I generally agree with this turn in Honneth's thinking regarding the basis of critical social theory. But, since Honneth relies mainly on *Minima Moralia*—in fact, he does not cite *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—and in doing so does not focus on the centrality of the concept to Adorno's method[249], and since Honneth is not so concerned with replying to the Habermasian criticism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I take a slightly different tack here in unpacking this notion of physiognomy. Adorno's method, even in his inaugural lecture, "The Actuality of Philosophy," which Honneth does spend some time interpreting, attempts an unearthing of the subterranean rationality in actually existing reality through a physiognomy of the particulars of enlightenment culture. While Honneth does locate the source of normativity in Adorno's critical theory in actual experience, he places it in what he calls a "supercharged" concept of suffering. That is, the intermundane experience of suffering needs the additional

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[248] Axel Honneth, "A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life: A Sketch of Adorno's Social Theory," *Constellations* 12, no. 1, (2005): 50-64.

[249] Though, this focus is implicit in Honneth's explication of Adorno's use of Weber's notions of constellation and ideal type.

support of the Freudian categories of neuroses and the wish to be freed from such pathologies in order to ground the normative claims that the construction of subjects and the freedom of subjects ought to be different. This account culminates in the claim that childhood and the literal imitation through which children learn provides a non-conceptual (in Honneth's terminology, non-cognitive) foundation for not only our practical orientation to others, but for knowledge itself. [250]

The problem, then, for Honneth's interpretation of Adorno is not its attempt to reinterpret Adorno's social theory as a physiognomy. This in fact is similar to the interpretation I offered in chapter 4 whereby through the constellative method, the historical is to be taken as a symbol of the natural and the natural as a symbol for the historical. Rather, the problem arises in the move from this to the attempt to claim that Adorno provides a non-cognitive foundation for both our practical orientation toward others and theoretical orientation toward the objective world. The notion of mimesis here makes a return. For, Honneth, in interpreting Adorno is, in essence, claiming that mimesis, here interpreted as the imitation of others, does provide a non-cognitive, "reason before reason," which is supposed to provide the ground for normative criticism of failed developmental processes as well as the reified appearances those processes take on in public discourse.

Honneth, then, while essentially accepting the interpretative claim of Habermas, that the only potential source of reconciliation in Adorno's work is mimesis, gives that a positive spin, arguing that mimesis is, in a way, the appearance, the sign for the fact that developmentally, human beings must imitate other human beings to become human beings. And, interestingly, Judith Butler's criticism of Honneth in her reply to his Tanner lectures is a reformulation,

[250]This further step linking mimesis with knowledge and morality is taken in Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 62-63.

whether she recognizes this or not, of Habermas' claim that Adorno requires a reason before reason. This is the first problem with Honneth's attempt to redeem Adorno's thinking in this fashion. It posits the affinity with others as a positive conception of rationality, which, as I showed at the end of the last section, lets in the door the defender of torture.

Honneth's appropriation of Adorno also fails for another reason. This interpretation of Adorno cannot make sense of the notion of interpretation that Adorno's philosophy requires. Honneth moves too quickly from the conception of mimesis or imitative reason to a claim to the grounding of norms. Instead, mimesis only names the potential orientation toward the object of inquiry that is required to come to an adequate interpretation and expression. In addition, one must take seriously the ability of the subject to engage in self-conscious appropriation of concepts through imagination and memory. Perhaps Honneth intends to capture this ability through the "super-charged concept of suffering," but as I have interpreted Adorno, this ability for experience cannot be reduced to mere psychoanalytic categories, but rather, must also incorporate the objective possibilities spelled out in chapter 4 and which one might summarize with the concept of a self-constituting humanity, a solidarity that acknowledges the individual's connection not merely with her own suffering, but with the suffering of others and the potentials for overcoming the causes of suffering implicit in the very social conditions that are at the root of this suffering. If one leans on mimetic or imitative reason without mediation, one is left with Habermas' criticism above, that one is merely positing a reason before reason in which the ideal is the linguistic communion with nature.

Section II Wellmer, Messianism, and Utopia

For Wellmer, Adorno

"is only able to construct a connection to social change by interpreting the 'non-violent synthesis' of the work of art and the configurative language of philosophy—aporetically—as a glimmer of

messianic light glimpsed in the here and now, an anticipation of reconciliation in the real world. The critique of instrumental reason cannot do without a philosophy of history based on the idea of reconciliation; it needs a utopian perspective because it would cease to be conceivable as critique otherwise. But if history has to become the Other of history in order to escape the system of delusion that is instrumental reason, then the critique of the historical present moment turns into a critique of historical being—the latest form of a theological critique of the earthly vale of tears. The critique of identitary reason seems ultimately to result in a choice between cynicism and theology—unless we wish to argue for a cheerful acceptance of the regression or disintegration of the self without regard for the consequences."[251]

The key to answering this claim is in the conditional that makes up the third sentence. The antecedent here, "if history has to become the Other of history in order to escape the system of delusion that is instrumental reason," does not hold, and so the claim that Adorno's work is merely the latest form a pseudo-theological critique does not follow. The grounds for Wellmer's claim are the same as those Habermas presents as the source of Adorno's performative contradiction; this criticism depends on the claim that Adorno is engaged in a groundless, self-undermining critique of instrumental reason. But, as I showed above, that claim does not hold; the process of coming to an interpretation through an adequate orientation to the object and in which there occurs an expression of the rational potentials of the species shows that there is a rational element in Adorno's work. A fuller answer, however, requires more specifics. Given the interpretation of Adorno explicated in chapter 4 and defended above, what is the status of the seeming utopian claims in Adorno's work? For, as I pointed out above in replying to Habermas, Adorno requires a conception of utopia, a relationship between reason and an alternative. Wellmer is correct in this respect, but incorrect that this utopia can only take the form of the other of history.

In Adorno's work, utopia is not held out as the other of history as Wellmer claims.

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[251] Albrecht Wellmer, "The Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism: The Critique of Reason since Adorno," *The Persistence of Modernity*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991) 63.

Mimesis is not merely the outside of reason as it exists. Rather, mimesis in the relevant sense here, and this should be clear from the discussion of the concept in Section I, Part I, while articulating the possibility of an openness to the things of the world, an orientation that is able to respect the object, is also always mediated by reason, language, and the social more generally, as they actually exist. Yet, this does not dismiss any and all possibility of meaning and a practical orientation to the world. For, the identification with another is still possible, even if this identification is mediated by categories as they exist. See, for example, the anecdote regarding the dramatization of Anne Frank's life in the introduction of the chapter. There, the immediate identification is mediated by the categories of anti-Semitism. But, even in that form—embodied in the claim, "Yes, but *that* girl at least should have been allowed to live"— the possibility of an alternative is present. The very concepts implicit in such a judgment, life and society, offer the possibility of reinterpretation of one's own experience. This reinterpretation, *if it takes place*, engages the memory and imagination in a self-conscious expression of the contradictions within the original interpretation, the very process I laid out in chapter 4. To say that such reinterpretations are rare, or that language, and the categories used to understand the world frustrate this process is not to say that the process is impossible and thus we must look to the heavens for redemption. Instead, the potential for redemption is to be found in the very conditions that make the original claim possible, in the concepts of life and humanity. Adorno makes this clear in the way he approvingly speaks of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in particular, his claim that the Social Democrats had failed in their conception of history and their assumption of progress. For the party

"contented itself with assigning the working-class the role of the savior of future generations. It thereby severed the sinews of its greatest power. Through this schooling the class forgot its hate as much as its spirit of sacrifice. For both nourish themselves on the picture of enslaved

forebears, not on the ideal of the emancipated heirs."[252]

For the ideals regarding the future to be meaningful, the suffering of the past must be acknowledged, claimed, and understood. In the interpretation of Adorno I am offering, the ideals that would redeem the future are implicit in the past, and can be made explicit through interpretation and expression. And they must be, or all is truly lost; we really can only be saved by a god.

The ground for Wellmer's interpretive claim against Adorno comes from the same supposed insight as Habermas', namely the claim that Adorno (and Horkheimer) are stuck within a model of knowledge in which a self-positing subject identifies and controls objects. Adorno's problem from this perspective is the failure to acknowledge the ways in which the subject's existence is itself mediated, especially by language, which always exists before the subject and sets the terms of its positing of itself and the objects it would understand through identitary reason. Adorno's thought "repeats once more that very 'forgetfulness of language' characteristic of European rationalism, which it had itself in a sense criticized."[253] If this criticism is right, then the conception of experience that I have argued provides a way to come to an adequate orientation to reality as well as a way to interpret that reality and finally express that interpretation in fact merely extends the faulty metaphysics of the subject.

But, I think I have shown not only that Adorno acknowledges this mediation by language, but also incorporates it into his analysis. It is true that Adorno is not Habermas and does not take the counter-factual norms implicit in the social-linguistic reproduction of society and the subject

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[252] Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, trans. Dennis Redmond. http://dennisredmond.com/ThesesonHistory.html. Accessed July 11, 2011.

[253] Wellmer, "The Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism: The Critique of Reason since Adorno," 64.

as providing quasi-foundational criteria for guiding the discussions of practical matters and ultimately a conception of utopia conceived of in linguistic terms, but he does take seriously the ways in which the subject is already structured by the linguistic system into which it is born. That is to say, first, that insofar as Adorno focuses on the universal, and its expression in language, it is clear from the interpretation I have put forward that language has a role in the construction of the subject. This is clear both in the account of the evolution of language in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* summarized above and Adorno's later critique of language as *mere* communication. And, as concepts take on a key role in the possibility of experience, language too, is necessary for experience. But, to take language as a necessary aspect of interpretation and expression is not to reduce experience to its linguistic aspect.

Part III Human Rights and Experience

To further demonstrate the usefulness and theoretical coherence of both the concepts spelled out in chapter four, memory and imagination, and those arrived at in this chapter, orientation, interpretation, and expression, I now turn to a specific contemporary political problem: human rights. There is a sense in which all rights and claims to rights participate in reification, that is they fall into the problem Lukaćs' articulates for practical reason and summarized in chapter 4. The claim that a right has been violated reduces specific acts or structures of violence and domination and the specific human relationships involved in those structures and actions into a single, seemingly unchanging conceptual system. And, this conceptual system is inevitably imbedded in a global society and the society of an individual nation-state which tend to crystalize human relationships as though they were merely examples of the concepts at work, and to do so in a detrimental way. But, looking at the struggles over human rights through the positions I've laid out here show up not only the possibilities of the

"new kind of human,"[254] but also the regressions and diversions risked in such struggles. The attempt to articulate human rights claims in the face of unjust violence, avoidable deprivation, and repression is the attempt to redeem the possibilities of the species given the current state of subjectivity, our productive resources, and our conceptual development.

As a preliminary, it is worthwhile to look at how Adorno links the explicit naming of rights in the charter of the United Nations to the historical experience of the Holocaust.

> "*Legalities.*—What the Nazis did to the Jews was unspeakable: language has no word for it, since even mass murder would have sounded, in face of its planned, systematic totality, like something from the good old days of the serial killer. And yet a term needed to be found if the victims—in any case too many for their names to be recalled—were to be spared the curse of having no thoughts turned unto them. So in English the concept of genocide was coined. But by being codified, as set down in the International Declaration of Human Rights, the unspeakable was made, for the sake of protest, commensurable. By its elevation to a concept, its possibility is virtually recognized: an institution to be forbidden, rejected, discussed. One day negotiations may take place in the forum of the United Nations on whether some new atrocity comes under the heading of genocide, whether nations have a right to intervene that they do not want to exercise in any case, and whether in view of the unforeseen difficulty of applying it in practice the whole concept of genocide should be removed from the statutes. Soon afterwards there are inside-page headlines in journalese: East Turkestan genocide programme nears completion."[255]

What Adorno describes here mirrors the events surrounding UN discussions of the genocide in Darfur and the discussions regarding the genocide in Rwanda in the mid-1990s. But, Adorno's take on the International Declaration of Human Rights remains paradoxical. One must name that which cannot be named, but in doing so, one acknowledges its continuing possibility. Naming it makes it able to be thought abstractly, and in thinking about it abstractly, ignoring it becomes more acceptable. Human rights discourse allows for a way of reifying human suffering that was not possible before the existence of human rights discourse. But, the actual material possibility of genocide is at the source of the reification; genocide itself is the reification of human

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[254] Theodor Adorno, "The Problem of a New Type of Human Being," *Current of Music*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2009).

[255] Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle," 6-7.

suffering. Only by ridding the victims of their individual humanity could they be eliminated as though they were specimens. In other words, Adorno's account is only paradoxical in that the naming of human rights implies their potential existence in practice, which, of course, we have not achieved. The material inability of humanity to achieve these rights, while we possess the capabilities for doing so, is the source of the paradox. And so, Adorno's paradoxical expression here, that we must name the un-nameable, at once keeps available—theoretically, at least,—the world in which we do not need such a word as "genocide," while also realizing that we do not live in such a world, that genocide will continue. But, in addition, the way of expressing this idea, as a paradox, or seeming paradox anyway, seems designed to demonstrate the claim that is made explicitly at the outset of the passage: that expression in language risks reification, the elimination of the particulars of genocide in favor of the abstraction, "genocide," and so we must always be aware of the particulars in expressing ourselves with general terms; language itself is not free, not unaffected by the very social conditions that produce the possibility of genocide.

From this, then we can begin to understand the struggle for human rights in general, and specific struggles for human rights for what they are: a struggle over the meaning of experience, both collective and individual. Again, note the straight-forward reading of Adorno's take on the human rights project: The attempt to name the unnameable and to give thought to those who otherwise will have no thoughts turned to them. The project of human rights, then, emerges as a particular historical attempt to engage what I am calling the self-conscious memory with the tragedy of the Holocaust. Already, then, human rights at their origin are to be seen not as ahistorical universals that hold across place, but rather the specific attempt to remember the victims of violence, and the attempt, not to give violence, death, and destruction of human beings a teleological meaning or purpose—that would be a mere outrage—but at least to remember in

some institutional sense, that this happened, this person, these people were destroyed. And still today, human rights struggles take up the responsibility of memory.

Two general insights emerge in understanding human rights in this way. First, their codification is an historical achievement, conditioned, of course, by their actual violation. Second, the construction of the concept of human rights is an attempt to make the horrors of the past commensurable with the present. This implies an orientation to the future as well, to remember in this sense, then, is at once to emphasize that human rights have not been achieved, but that their achievement remains a possibility. Human rights, like reason as it has come to exist, historical reason, the principle of organization of the dominant society is itself antagonistic. In this sense, they play out the problem of practical reason and the possibilities of practical subjectivity. In his discussion of Hegel's philosophy of history, Adorno reports the last words of Franz von Sickingen, a figure who exists at the beginning of the modern period, as "nothing without cause."[256] For Adorno, these words encapsulate the fate of the individual in the modern world. The individual is beholden to the course of history, which is determined by forces beyond his control. And these forces are disconnected from the individual, not just in that they are beyond any individual's control, but also in their inability to achieve individual happiness, to meet the interests and needs of individuals. There is no longer a subject for whom this system exists. Yet, in the struggle for human rights, the attempt is made by these subjects to at once articulate the past and change the future into one in which at least some possibility for a meaningful, non-repressive life.

Human rights, then, in the face of these forces and the subjects embedded in this system, are ambiguous, an aspect of the antagonistic social structure. In actual struggles, for example, the

[256]Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 318.

recent revolt in Egypt, it is clear that subjects are capable not only of memory in the sense mentioned above and explicated more fully in chapter 4, but also imagination in the relevant sense. That is, contemporary subjects remain capable of experience. Note, with regard to this understanding of memory, that people in Egypt were not only able to experience their past, but actively attempted to prevent that past from being institutionally erased. Those participating in the revolt occupied the offices of the state security apparatus to prevent the destruction of the records of torture and abuse at the hands of the Mubarak regime. The experiences of torture and loss were not to be erased. They should be preserved in some institutional form. And the fundamental demand of the protestors, that Mubarak resign and democratic elections be held, shows imagination, an attempt to envision a future in which people exercise at least a modicum of control over their own lives in a realm that had formerly been outside their control.

Note, too, that even some spectators of the revolt engaged in experience in the relevant sense. Some citizens of the United States in particular, took their own guilt in the Mubarak regime's torture seriously by applauding the Egyptian revolutionaries and their attempts to preserve the records of torture of both domestic opponents of the government, but also those who were tortured on behalf of the United States in its so-called “war on terror.” This requires, first of all, the identification both with the Egyptian revolutionaries and even the victims of torture, the very people Americans are told are trying to kill them, an exercise of the imagination. So, these gestures, while certainly not a full-fledged interpretation of the events in Egypt, at the very least reveal an orientation that is open to the events, and which has at its core some level of solidarity, fellow-feeling, even if the expression of this orientation was largely via social media such as facebook or twitter. The risk in these sorts of expressions is not a failure of orientation, but rather a failure in interpretation of both the events themselves, and one's own actions in the face of

those events. I have in mind here the impression that, by leaving a comment or "liking" a facebook page providing updates and articulating the demands of Egyptians, one has actually done something. One could continue down the path of memory and imagination, of self-conscious experience by coming to one's complicity in these the very abuses others are struggling against, but the mere gesture in social media does not rise to this necessarily.

But, there can also be a failure of orientation. And this emerges in the expression. To fail in this fashion is not merely to portray things that do not exist or do not exist in the particular configuration that is portrayed. That could be said of any expression that strives to be art. Rather, the failure of orientation, when it occurs, is clear in an expression that it does not open itself to the phenomenon.

As an example, Adam Reeder's sculpture, "Evolution of a Revolution"[257] illustrates how an art work can go wrong as expression. It reduces the real struggles of the Egyptian people to two images. Hieroglyphics and contemporary technology emblazoned with the trademarks of corporations. Here, we have a case in which the orientation of solidarity at least seems present, yet which fails on the level of both interpretation and expression. Certainly modern technology had something to do with the revolt in Egypt. Yet, to reduce it, as this piece does, to the image of a hieroglyphic Egyptian holding a cellular phone entirely misses the experience of the revolt, even the experience of the spectator. It turns the potential progress of a people, won through struggle and suffering, to a caricature in which the Egyptians fit neatly into the story of progress the West, an in particular, Americans tell about themselves. The piece seems to say: Egyptians built the pyramids, and then did nothing for thousands of years. That is, until apple, facebook, twitter, and cellular phones made their revolution possible. Technological progress is equated

[257] Adam Reeder, *The Evolution of Revolution*, 2011. http://www.studiorealism.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/egypt_sculpture.jpg. Accessed March 27, 2011.

with political progress. Political change is brought about not through struggle and suffering, but through the pseudo-natural advance of technology. And not mere technological progress, but essentially, the form it has now taken in the so-called developed world, the continual introduction of new, proprietary gadgets that vaguely promise something about making life easier or better, but which, in fact, turn out to be largely ways to spend one's time not actually doing anything. In the end, the piece seems little more than an advertisement, not only for these tools of social media, but Reeder's own work. Even the form of the piece, sculpture designed to replicate the hieroglyphic images of the pyramids, but with anachronistic corporate logos interspersed, is essentially pedantic; it all but gives up the distance from events it might take through its existence as semblance. It as if the title of the work were enough to give us its content.

Contrast this with Adorno's reflections on *Guernica* as an example of autonomous art that simultaneously does not disown its relationship to the society in which it exists.

> "In expression they reveal themselves as the wounds of society; expression is the social ferment of their autonomous form. The principle witness for this is Picasso's *Guernica* that, strictly incompatible with prescribed realism, precisely by means of inhumane construction, achieves a level of expression that sharpens it to social protest beyond all contemplative misunderstanding. The socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts; where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light."[258]

Guernica, with its dissembled human and animal parts, succeeds as expression because it shows the lie to the fascist struggle for Spain, but also, more generally portrays the effects of the new phenomenon of total war and the new technology of the bomber.

The summary of Adorno's interpretation of *Guernica* and the criticism of Reeder's work above shows that there are better and worse ways of orienting oneself to a phenomenon, interpreting that phenomenon, and finally expressing that interpretation. These categories are not

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[258] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 237.

hard and fast. In the Reeder piece, it seems there is at least a gesture toward the event itself, the piece might not have acknowledged the Egyptians at all or that there is a continuing struggle for democratic control in Egypt. Insofar as this is the case, the piece does not completely fail in its orientation. Yet, it seems to fall into identity thinking, to affirm the society in which it exists and to thereby disown its own guilt in relation to global society, and with it the guilt of the potential audience of the piece.

Part IV Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have shown that the interpretation of Adorno's work in which I offer a conception of practical reason does not succumb to the most influential criticisms of Adorno's project. Adorno neither requires nor endorses a return to nature of the sort implied by Habermas' criticism that his critique of existing reality requires mimesis as a reason before reason, his philosophy either depends on irrational foundations or an implausible conception of reason in which humans must have a communicative relationship with nature. In short, this objection fails to take seriously the relationship between concepts and mimesis, the social development of the species. Nor does Adorno's work imply an inevitable performative contradiction. Instead, his mode of expression is designed to orient us properly to the objects of experience; his expression is frequently formulated in paradoxical terms because reality itself continues to be contradictory.

Wellmer's criticism that Adorno's normative standpoint, the possibility of a solution to the problem of practical reason, requires an implausible messianic philosophy of history is merely the inverted form of Habermas' criticism regarding mimesis. Instead of forcing Adorno's position into a pre-historical foundationalism, Wellmer's interpretation, while in some ways more sympathetic to Adorno, forces his work into projecting redemption into the future in a concrete way. To put this another way, Adorno supposedly fails to ground the possibility of practical

reason, in the everyday experience of existing subjects. Instead, and this becomes clear in the discussion of Adorno's conception of language as well as the more general interpretation of Adorno's conception of experience I offer in chapter 4, the possibilities of overcoming existing reality remain, even with the damaged subjectivity of contemporary societies, within and between those very subjects. Experience, as the self-conscious engagement with the past and the future, bringing into play both the individual's failures and possibilities along with the conceptual resources of the species, is possible and offers a potential engagement with the social world which does not merely affirm what exists over and over.

Chapter 6 Practical Reason, Universality, and Resistance

I have tried to provide a conception of practical reason derived from Adorno's work that is both theoretically viable and that provides a way of understanding real struggles in the contemporary world. Generally, critics have taken Adorno's project as purely critical, with no coherent conception of reason at its heart, and certainly not a conception practical reason. I have demonstrated, however, not only that Adorno's thinking provides a conception of practical reason and thus ethical subjectivity, but also that this conception of practical reason is useful in understanding and criticizing the contemporary world. In the face of the seemingly total reification of the practical world as described by Lukaćs, but without the potential political and epistemological agent that can both see through reified second nature and potentially change that second nature, Adorno turns to a conception of practical reason that is, in essence, a conception of experience. This conception of experience is very specific, however, in that it requires the activation of self-conscious memory and imagination. Adorno articulates these interrelated faculties through the notion of the constellation, a procedure he adapts from Benjamin and that aims to at once keep open the subject's orientation to the object, yet allow for interpretation of the object through concepts. This conception of experience also brings Adorno's notions of mimesis and utopia into play in that the immediate identification with an object allows for an open orientation to the object. While the notion of utopia, as implicit in aspects of the conceptual resources the species has developed, namely concepts like freedom, allow for the interpretation of objects in such a way that a different world, a different society is kept open. Memory, then connects the suffering body to the conceptual resources of the species, while imagination allows for the connection to other concepts, and the projection of something different. In this conclusion, I first relate this conception of practical reason to the critique of idealism. Second, I

address the question of the universality of the conception of practical reason presented here. Lastly, and emerging from this question of universality, I address what this conception of practical reason means for actually existing critical movements.

This conception of practical reason is connected to the critique of idealism that runs through Adorno's thought. In part, chapter 2 and 3 show that Kant's conception of the practical subject and its transcendental possibility are inadequate to present social conditions. But, as should be clear, Adorno is not content to merely criticize the idealist tradition, but rather uses the very assumptions of idealism against it in order to reveal the possibilities still remaining in its key concepts like freedom and the imagination. In this vein, I have shown that Adorno's conception of practical reason merges the key concepts of idealism with the historically necessary shift to materialism in social theory. The very gaps in Kant's thinking about society and the sociality of the subject call for reflection upon both the material body and the categories of materialist social theory. That is, despite general pessimism of this account, Adorno is attempting to show the possibility of the material redemption of the most optimistic categories of idealism: freedom and imagination. Not only are there objective material possibilities in the existing forces of production, but subjective possibilities that are described in the notion of experience developed here. The hope for overcoming our second nature, our self-constituted hell, depends on overcoming our self-constituted fear. In the final analysis, Adorno's conception of practical reason challenges us to overcome the historical form of the principle of self-preservation. More specifically, the fear that in part drove us to subjugate our instincts and put off gratification is no longer necessary to provide for the basic needs of people. This is the essence of Adorno's claim that “there is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no one should go hungry.” The fear of being left to fend for oneself, the fear of being excluded from

society to such a degree that one ends up homeless, hungry, completely dependent is at root the fear that keeps people in line. It at once squelches the subject's memory and imagination. It eliminates the possibility of experience. And, this then is why the experience of one's own suffering under such conditions must be the starting point for the subjective possibility of experience. Society, a concept which is developed in the body of the dissertation, implies the well-being of its members. Here one can see the connection between the conception of practical reason developed in the dissertation and the social contract tradition, including Rawls; for self-interest is generally given as the rational motivation for leaving the state of nature and entering a society, and in Rawls, is assumed in the original position. Even from the basest conception of reason as the rational pursuit of one's self-interest, the societies in which we live are irrational. But, the subjective possibility of recognizing this irrationality is the ability to experience in the sense spelled out in the dissertation. One cannot see the irrationality of the present organization of our societies without taking seriously the experience of one's own suffering. The idealist conception of freedom can only be developed in relation to the real material unfreedom of the individuals in contemporary societies. So, as I've articulated in the idea of non-identity thinking, and the procedure of the constellation, a connection with the supposed irrational, the body, underlies the ability to conceive of rational criticism, yet, criticism requires the bringing of concepts into relation to the object of experience. To be clear again, however, the key here is in the reflection upon the impulses one has toward the object, not the mere synthesis of emotion and reason. Solidarity, the social aspect of the experience in this sense, is required for the intersubjective recognition of the irrationality of existing society. And, in fact, the ability to actually experience one's own suffering, to reflectively remember and imagine in the sense I've articulated seems to require the intersubjective recognition of others' suffering. For, without this,

one appears to oneself as insane in a sane society and faced with the coldness of social relations in which we exist stays insane or decides to embrace the social isolation that is the mode of existence in contemporary society.

But, the concept of experience developed here remains somewhat ambiguous. In particular, it is not clear what concepts are supposed to be brought to bear in a particular encounter with an object or phenomenon. This conception of practical reason does not provide a concept or procedure for determining the validity of orientation, interpretation, and expression. I think the way to articulate this problem is to ask whether this concept of experience is supposed to be universal, that is, apply to all members of the species, or since, as I have claimed, it is the attempt to deal with both a geographically and historically specific problem, is it simply the articulation of the possibilities of the subjects who live under the material conditions of contemporary capitalism in the form it has taken in the west—essentially, western Europe and the United States? By addressing the question of universality, I can provide some insight into the question of what concepts are supposed to be involved in experience by being brought to bear through the self-conscious engagement of memory and imagination with bodily reactions.

First, there is a strain of universalism in Adorno's thinking, derived from Kant, that supports the idea that much of what is developed here is supposed to be applicable to the species. When Adorno speaks of the species, he means the species, not merely some geographic subset of the species. There are three aspects of this universalism that are relevant. First, there is no people left that the expansion of capitalism has not touched, if only indirectly. Second, since the structure of the self will be, in part, a reflection of the structure of society, no subjects are left untouched by the expansion of capitalism to all corners of the earth. Lastly, and this helps us to understand Honneth's call for a weak, formal anthropology, the concept of experience and thus

practical reason developed here implies that certain conditions must be met in order for human beings to be flourishing.

In relation to the conclusions spelled out above, Adorno takes it that to have overcome the spell of what exists, we will have abolished want—"and I mean eradicated in all seriousness, not just on the surface, but for all mankind, universally, and on a global scale."[259] This forms, in part, the objective condition for experience. But, then, since this objective condition has not been met, are we not left back at Wellmer's criticism that the utopian impulse of Adorno's philosophy can only be articulated in an implausible philosophy of history that posits a condition outside of history in order to criticize history as it has actually occurred? The conception of practical reason articulated here, then, would only be an articulation of the helplessness of real individuals in the face of actual history.

What I want to make clear in this regard is that it is not only the body, but also the conceptual resources of the species available in this conception of practical reason that provide a connection with real material conditions. These resources eliminate the need for appeal to a messianic view of history. I've explained this in some detail in chapter 5, but in this context, the account of language from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides a way to explain the universalism of the concept of practical reason advanced here that also then gives an answer to the question of what concepts are supposed to be brought to bear in particular contexts. I conclude that only on the assumption of radical nominalism—that concepts are merely place holders with nothing but an arbitrary connection to the objects they claim to cover—is the connection between individual experience and the conceptual resources of the species severed, even under objectively horrid conditions.

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[259] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 183.

Recall from the account of language in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Adorno and Horkheimer present language as containing the possibility of overcoming the very conditions of domination through which language was itself constituted as more than mere mimetic impulse in the face of fear inducing nature. This is presented as a quasi-evolutionary account of the development of language. But, we see that even under fascism, the possibility remained of critique, as the example from the culture industry section illustrates. This has three implications in the present context. First, the everyday life of individuals, even in present societies, contain the possibility of, at the very least, understanding their own position as oppressed, dominated. Second, this possibility is preserved precisely in language, and in two aspects of language: the name and the concept. Third, that this possibility is preserved in language informs the sorts of concepts that are supposed to be brought to bear in specific historical struggles.

In bringing these conclusions about the conception of practical reason articulated here together in conceiving in what sense this conception is universal I want to turn to a final example from Adorno. Here, in Minima Moralia, Adorno articulates how a certain form—and Adorno admits, a particularly privileged form—of child's play holds open the objective possibility of a different second nature, one in which activities are engaged in for their own sakes rather than for the creation of surplus-value. And, this rehearsal is connected to the objective possibility of change through expression in language.

> "The unreality of games gives notice that reality is not yet real. Unconsciously they rehearse the right life. The relation of children to animals depends entirely on the fact that Utopia goes disguised in the creatures whom Marx even begrudged the surplus value they contribute as workers. In existing without any purpose recognizable to men, animals hold out, as if for expression, their own names, utterly impossible to exchange. This make them so beloved of children, their contemplation so blissful. I am a rhinoceros (*Nashorn*), signifies the shape of the rhinoceros."[260]

[260] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 228.

Initially, what is going on in the play of children in this context is not difficult to understand. They carry out activities for their own sakes rather than for the sake of their fungibility. They even carry out in altered form the activities of work. Children, through play that imitates work, express the possibility of right life, activities engaged in for their own sakes rather than in subordination to creation of surplus value. But, notice that in the passage above the causal relation is inverted, the name of the animal itself is what makes children enamored of them; it is not the love of children that makes the name of an animal a disguised instantiation of Utopia. Ironically, the left over expressive aspects of the name are precisely the site of resistance, while the nominalist tendencies in contemporary societies give words the aura of the spell. The nominalist tendency, and Adorno and Horkheimer give numerous examples of this in contemporary societies—from the record company naming the pop-star to the trade-marked names for branded goods—do so by mediating the relationship between word and object with purposiveness, and in particular, the attempt to manipulate people through language. So long as elements of the expressive aspect of language remain, resistance can be articulated. And, as was shown in chapter 5, the universals of the language continue to have this potential to express and not merely communicate clearly the claims of a person or group. Because concepts like freedom or the universal "free beings" contain the possibility of expression, they offer the possibility of saying more than the particulars that are captured by them.

This last insight has clear implications for existing resistance movements. Resistance to what exists, if it is not to become merely advertisement for itself must connect with both objective material possibilities and the expressive possibilities of language. Here one can see a problem with many of the institutionalized resistance movements, whether anti-capitalist, feminist, environmentalist, anti-racist. They no longer connect with those whom they ostensibly

speak for and instead look to them or their supporters as potential consumers to be manipulated.

> "...the word, which henceforth is allowed only to designate something and not to mean it, becomes so fixated on the object that it hardens into a formula. This affects language and subject matter equally. Instead of raising a matter to the level of experience, the purified word exhibits it as a case of an abstract moment, and everything else, severed from now defunct expression by the demand for pitiless clarity, therefore withers in reality also."[261]

In the context of social movements who seek to radically alter the status quo, then, several insights come to the fore. First, these movements might note the possibility or perhaps even the necessity to separate, if only temporarily in order to articulate experience, both individual and collective. That is, to remember in the terms of the dissertation. The omnipresent risk for any solidarity that does survive in the contemporary world is that it will become mere defense of privilege. Language itself, while preserving possibilities for change, for critique also threatens to become mere communication, the attempt to clearly label a problem to be solved and thus to appeal to existing structures to alleviate that problem. In the process, the connection to the experience that prompted the movement is lost. But, the connection to the potentials of the species are embedded in language. The tension here, then, is connecting particular experience and universal concepts like freedom. Given the state of the world, the ways in which particular people and groups of people are made to suffer in contemporary societies, this is particularly problematic. The potential exists for connecting, say the self-conscious memory of aspects of racial oppression to freedom, or society. Yet, it is possible that such oppression is not experienced as such, not experienced as a disconnect between the notion of freedom and the suffering imposed by racism. Instead, the terms of this suffering, the ways in which it might be expressed might be so particular that their experience cannot be connected to these potentials in a clear way. But, I think, this possibility does not indict the conception of practical reason spelled

[261] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 133.

out here. In the first place, this is perfectly consistent with the conception of freedom at work in this conception of practical reason. Freedom cannot be articulated except in connection with society, and at the very least, in relation with others. This is why I mention the potential necessity of separatist movements, at least as first step. Secondly, the possibility that particular experiences of oppression are not able to be immediately connected to the conceptual potentials of the species is perfectly consistent with the criticism of society underlying the concept of practical reason articulated here. The problem is not in how I have conceived of practical reason, but rather the problem of a second nature that has become so reified that even the most universal concepts through which resistance can be articulated are potentially implicated. Social isolation is the mode of being in contemporary capitalism.

None of this is to be taken as dictating to actually existing resistance movements. Besides the obvious fact that very few people will read this, it also follows from how I have conceived of practical reason here that the potentials of actual movements can only be actualized by those movements. With the emphasis I have placed on the particular in relation to the universal, and the rejection of non-identity thinking through Adorno's conception of the constellation, as well as the place imagination has in this theory of practical reason, it should be clear that general claims about real resistance to existing conditions of domination are at best exaggerations, and at worst identity thinking.

I hope then to have made clear a conception of practical reason as a concept of experience that is present in Adorno's thinking and from this conception offered critical insights into existing reality. I think that this conception of experience and some of the other ideas developed here offer several directions for future research including thinking about human rights, the domination of nature, and the related question of the possibility of a critical theory in the face of resource

constraints. At the very least, and consistent with the conception of experience here, I have expanded what it means to do philosophy under present conditions. And this is no small thing.

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