

C. AESTHETICS OF EXISTENCE :

NIETZSCHE AND HEIDEGGER

C1)

LIFE AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE : NIETZSCHE

Introduction

Nietzsche revalues the question of freedom in response to what he considers the repressive, life-denying moral laws underwritten by an over-bearing conceptual *ratio* since the time of Socrates and Plato. What has become the culturally instilled dualism of body and mind, an exclusion of somatic drives from any determining influence in the process of so-called rational thought, Nietzsche argues, continues to distort the modern questions of freedom and moral truth. Critical of the transcendental *a priori* character of Kant's categorical imperative and the dialectical rationality governing Hegel's secular metaphysics of Spirit, Nietzsche severs any necessary link between freedom and the conceptual *ratio*. Freedom now finds expression in the existential *poiesis* of an inner, self-reflexive pathos of aesthetic sensibility. This means that freedom is no longer tied to normative social relations with others nor to a metaphysical *telos* altogether beyond reach, but rather to values which best suit an individual's particular existential goals. No longer governed by any conceptually determinate, legislative moral judgement, these goals and the values supporting them are determined through a process of aesthetic evaluation. The actions resulting from this self-reflexive, aesthetic evaluation resemble those of an artist when producing a work of art. Indeed Nietzsche considers the actualisation of freedom to be indistinguishable from the actualisation of life as a work of art. Nietzsche thereby revalues the will to freedom as a self-styled evaluative aesthetics. What sustains this specifically aesthetic revaluation of freedom, Nietzsche indicates, is a faith in the fateful principle of eternal recurrence. This principle does not indicate, however, an historical ontology of the same eternally repetitive historical cycles, for this sameness would signify a profound passivity or resignation at the heart of Nietzsche's *amor fati*. More in keeping with the life-affirming style of Nietzsche's philosophy, the

principle of eternal recurrence indicates an historical ontology of perpetual dissimilarity where temporality is experienced as an ongoing coming into being of different life-enhancing aesthetic revaluations.¹ Fate becomes less an altogether heteronomous force the more it is generated by multiple re-affirmations of a life without remorse. In short, having faith in the principle of eternal recurrence signals not only the imaginative act of self-creation, but also the assumption of responsibility for all our actions, past, present, and future.

Nietzsche also develops this aesthetic revaluation of the question of freedom in critical response to the life-denying attitudes of guilt, resentment and complacency, which result from the stringent moral asceticism demanded by the Christian Church. Christianity has been the major contributor to this cultural nihilism by promising a condition which never eventuates, by consoling those suffering with an abstract transfiguration of their present condition in a mythical world beyond their earthly grasp. Focused primarily on the goal of eternal salvation in an extra-terrestrial realm, Christianity demonstrates a decisive tendency to dismiss as illusory and insignificant whatever pertains to this earthly existence. Whether achieved through good works or faith alone, Christian salvation orchestrates a thinly veiled repudiation of life on earth. In its ascetic deprecation of sensuous life, Christianity is marked by the will to escape or transcend it. Moreover, the power exercised by the high priests of Christianity occurs under cover of what Nietzsche calls the 'holy lie' - the promise to improve human morality through their own ascetic example, to save the guilty, paradoxically condemned by the ideological ministrations of their would be priestly saviours. Here the suppressed drive to freedom, in the interests of Christian morality, wreaks vengeance on the individual with the introspective guilt of a perpetual bad conscience. The psychological abyss produced through this unresolvable tension between somatic drives and moral reason, the mental anguish that results, is in turn the harbinger of disease, loss of strength and bodily decay. Nietzsche sums up this moral nihilism when he states -

This is the *antinomy*: In so far as we believe in morality, we pass sentence on existence. ... *Moral value judgments are ways of passing sentence, negations; morality is a way of turning one's back on the will to existence.*²

¹ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1969] tr. P. Paton, New York, Columbia U.P., 1994, p.126.

² F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [1906] tr. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York, Vintage Books, 1968, §6 and §11, pp.10-11. {Nietzsche's italics}

Such moral perversity is again apparent, Nietzsche maintains, in the atheist reaction to Christianity. Differently from guilt, this atheist reaction produces an attitude of resentment, since life now lacks purpose and meaning. Nothing is of value. Contrary to the more optimistic vision of Christian salvation, the atheist reaction is characterised by a pessimism in which the will to life has all but evaporated. This pessimism breeds boredom and weariness - resentment towards the routines and minor inconveniences that arise in everyday life. This repudiation of morality reveals a will to nothingness, which is despite itself a will all the same. Nietzsche's character Zarathustra personifies the atheist form of nihilism in what he calls 'the ugliest man'.³ There is a further form of nihilism, which Nietzsche articulates by way of what is termed 'the last man'.⁴ As with the atheist, 'the last man' gives no credence to God or any higher values associated therewith. Unlike the atheist, however, 'the last man' is not involved in a reactive denial of such values, but only with ensuring a good degree of comfort, pleasure, and health for himself, through which he may pass his days contentedly and without great calamity. 'The last man' thus displays an attitude of bovine complacency; a passive, herd creature who wants, with the least effort, to be like others. This claims 'the last man' is happiness; happiness made actual through an unreflective compliance with already actual moral conventions. Here the will to life degenerates into what is nothing more than a will to acquiesce - an illusory semblance of nature in what is more precisely a socially constituted 'second' nature.

Even before the cultural dominance of moral reason had been established on the basis of Plato's idea of the Good, the Sophists had been critical of morality. Against the Socratic *ratio*, it was the Sophists, Nietzsche points out, who -

verge upon the first *critique of morality*, ... they let it be known ... that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily *sophistical* ... they postulate the first truth that a 'morality-in-itself', a 'good-in-itself' do not exist, that it is a swindle to talk of 'truth' in this field.⁵

The Sophists, according to Nietzsche, were thus more moral than their rationalist, metaphysical detractors, since they acknowledged their unavoidable immorality. Contrary to the repressive implications arising in the purely rational articulation of moral values, morality, for the Sophists, is dependent on the specific conditions or context in which it is enunciated. What is unacknowledged by those philosophers and Christian theologians

³ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [1883-92] tr. W. Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* ed. W. Kaufmann, New York, Viking Press, 1972, p.375.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.129.

promoting morality on the basis of a universally valid or God-driven rationality is that the latter functions more exactly as the instrumental means of a physiological drive to self-preservation. When this rationality is applied to the natural and later the social sciences in the name of enlightenment and progress, its cultural actuality reveals, however, contrary to the opinion of most psychologists, an oppressive and destructive will to power over nature and other human subjects. This reversal, Nietzsche maintains, is clearly evident in modern civilisation.

Nietzsche thereby confronts the enlightenment's self-preserving ethos of freedom with the actual social dominion exercised by political and religious leaders in the name of enlightenment rationality.⁶ Moreover, with his statement 'There is nothing in reality that would correspond strictly with logic',⁷ Nietzsche clearly rejects the priority accorded the conceptual *ratio* in both the Socratic and Hegelian forms of dialectic. Nietzsche thereby reveals a critical perspective, Adorno notes, similar to that which drives his own critical social theory. The emphasis Nietzsche places on the somatic mediation of language and thought, his critique of philosophical systems and traditional moral values, and his turn to aesthetic criteria of judgement, constitute sufficient reason for Adorno to hail Nietzsche's philosophy as a 'liberating act, a true turning point of Western thought'.⁸ Adorno's high regard for Nietzsche's critique of enlightenment reason is again evident in his review of the fourth volume of Newman's biography of Richard Wagner.⁹ At the same time, however, Adorno draws attention to what he considers most problematic in Nietzsche's idea of freedom - namely the claim to transcend heteronomous resistance through a self-affirming agonism. Similar to the transcendental authority of Kant's categorical imperative, Nietzsche's principle of eternal recurrence is a self-reflexive command to 'Grow hard'. Sentiments of sorrow and compassion are refused in the faith that whatever our fate, it is wholly self-willed.

Both principles [that of Kant and Nietzsche] aim at independence
from external powers, as the unconditioned maturity defined as the

⁵ *Ibid.*, §428, p.233. {Nietzsche's italics and inverted commas}

⁶ F. Nietzsche, *Kultur und Kunst* §413 and *Will to Power* Bk. I, §129. These passages are cited by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* tr. J. Cumming, New York and London, Verso, 1989, p.44.

⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Hegel : Three Studies* [1963] tr. S.W. Nicholson, Cambridge Massachusetts and London England, M.I.T., 1993, p.76.

⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966] tr. E.B. Ashton, New York, Continuum, 1990, p.23.

⁹ T.W. Adorno, 'Wagner, Nietzsche and Hitler' in *Kenyon Review* vol.IX, no.1, 1947, pp.160-161.

essence of enlightenment.¹⁰

Similarly, it may be argued, Nietzsche passes over, in the moment of self-affirmation, the extent to which guilt and resentment remain socially embedded in our psychological make-up. These attitudes will not dissolve simply through an individual's self-disciplinary attempt to transvalue them, however arbitrarily engendered these attitudes might otherwise appear. Only through the historical collapse of the capitalist mode of exchange and the social conventions that ideologically sustain it could these nihilist attitudes perhaps disappear.

Affective and Mental Experience

With their transcendental dialectic of reason, the Idealists consider the will to truth as the *a priori* property of a self-consciously rational, unified subject. In contrast Nietzsche argues that the will to truth emerges as the hierarchically self-regulating coordination of a multiplicity of somatic drives. That is to say, coordination is brought about through one of these somatic drives gaining ascendancy over the others as the result of a particular corporeal need. The will to truth, Nietzsche argues, is thus nothing but the discursive articulation of a dominant somatic drive. Hence we *are* primarily bodies, or more precisely a plurality of drives and passions each working towards its own self-enhancement. These drives determine the manner in which we assimilate the world through a Dionysian or artistic pathos of inner self-distance.¹¹ This assimilation occurs firstly through an unconscious physiological perception, where undifferentiated sensory affects are organised according to a body's particular needs.¹² Indeed Nietzsche indicates in *The Will to Power* that -

Before a judgement occurs, the process of assimilation must already have taken place; thus here, too, there is an intellectual activity that does not enter consciousness, as pain does as a consequence of a wound. Probably an inner event corresponds to each organic function; hence assimilation, rejection, growth, etc.¹³

On the basis of this affectively driven configuration of somatic drives, or what is an agonistic will to self-mastery, sensuous experience is transformed into linguistic signs.

¹⁰ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* op. cit., pp.114-115.

¹¹ D. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason* London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.62.

¹² C. Crawford, 'Nietzsche's Physiology of Ideological Criticism' in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist* ed. C. Koelb, Albany, SUNY, 1990.

Nietzsche already points out in his 'Lectures on Rhetoric' that '[The person], who forms language, does not perceive things or events, but impulses. ... Instead of the thing, the sensation takes in only a *sign*'.¹⁴ The conscious, rhetorical organisation of language mimics the unconscious configuration of affects, or what is no different, the coordination of the body's competing drives. In these same lectures Nietzsche further states that -

what is called 'rhetorical', as a means of conscious art, had been active as a means of unconscious art in language and its development.¹⁵

In other words, what is consciously redeemed in language may veil the extent to which language remains determined by the unconscious physiology of affective experience.

This determining relation of somatic drives to the rhetorical organisation of language does not signify, however, that our assimilation of the external world is wholly determined by these drives. The assimilation of the external world is as much due to 'our conscious ideological positioning at any given time'.¹⁶ In other words the limits and possibilities of the body's coordination of somatic drives is also shaped according to our present persuasion or belief concerning the world. In Nietzsche's words -

It cannot be doubted that *all sense perceptions are permeated with value judgements* (useful and harmful - consequently, pleasant or unpleasant). ... Believing is the primal beginning even in every sense impression : a kind of affirmation of the first intellectual activity! A 'holding-true' in the beginning.¹⁷

This 'holding true' implies a value, a value whose determining influence over the somatic drives has seemingly Idealist implications. The idealism apparent in this already held belief conflicts with Nietzsche's previous claim that the somatic drives originally produce such belief. Despite this inconsistency, Nietzsche's point is that there is no strictly isomorphic relation between belief and the hierarchical coordination of somatic drives. Both mediate the other in an ongoing process of ever-changing individual experience. Mind and body are thus considered in a functional relation the one to the other; a relationship which Nietzsche interprets as the lived expression of an individual's will to power. Any particular belief that is given articulation may be judged only

¹³ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* op. cit., §532, p.289.

¹⁴ F. Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric [1872-73]' in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, tr. S. Gilman, C. Blair, and D. Parent, New York and Oxford, Oxford U.P., 1989. pp.21-23. {Nietzsche's italics}

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21. {Nietzsche's inverted commas}

¹⁶ C. Crawford, 'Nietzsche's Physiology of Ideological Criticism' in *op. cit.*, p.164.

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, op. cit., §505 and §506, p.275.

according to the manner in which it serves to enhance or detract from an individual's capacity for self-mastery and freedom.

Nietzsche's interpretation of the mind/body relation holds a certain affinity with Adorno's negative dialectics. For like Nietzsche, Adorno is intent on critically undermining the priority accorded the conceptual *ratio* in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and reinstating the somatic drives, or at least affective experience, as a determining aspect of mental expression. Adorno states unequivocally -

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. ... Conscious unhappiness is not a delusion of the mind's vanity but something inherent in the mind, the one authentic dignity it has received in its separation from the body. This dignity is the mind's negative reminder of its physical aspect; its capability of that aspect is the only source of whatever hope the mind can have.¹⁸

Idealism, on the other hand, as our foregoing discussions of Kant and Hegel indicate, consistently disables any claim to the affective determination of consciousness. All affective spontaneity is crippled through a copy-bound mimesis; that is, through idealism's phenomenologically bound empiricism and its *a priori* transcendental rationality. Nietzsche's critique of such thinking reverberates in Adorno's claim that -

What clings to the image remains idolatry, mythic enthrallment. The totality of images blends into a wall before reality. The image theory denies the spontaneity of the subject, ... If the subject is bound to mulishly mirror the object - necessarily missing the object, which only opens itself to the subjective surplus in thought - the result is the unpeaceful spiritual silence of integral administration.¹⁹

Affective mental experience is effectively reduced to a pre-packaged duplication of social reality, such that social relations now assume the illusory semblance of a second nature. Conscious mental experience remains reified in this mimetic identity of nature and society.

Critical of the subsumption of affective experience in empirical phenomena, Nietzsche rejects the passive, imitative character of mimesis through which that subsumption occurs. In stark contrast to Plato's mimetic taboo and its exclusion of art from the domain of moral and objective truth, however, Nietzsche's rejection has in view precisely the redemption of artistic experience as a vital expression of moral truth.

¹⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., pp.202-203.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.205.

Nevertheless there are grounds for arguing that Nietzsche articulates a transfigurative mimetic relation between somatic drives and mental experience; one similar to that explicitly rescued by Adorno. Adorno's notion of mimesis, as Michael Cahn points out, draws its inspiration from the mimicry or impersonation carried out by dancers and actors in early Greek theatre.²⁰ Here the emphasis was not so much on passively re-presenting, or merely imitating a particular figure, but rather on an active re-modeling or transfiguring of that figure. Nietzsche also suggests just this transfigurative character of mimesis when he makes the claim that -

[B]etween two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is at most an *aesthetic* relation : I mean a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue - for which there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force.²¹

Nietzsche goes on to explicate this aesthetic relation in terms of an object's metaphorical transfiguration in language; a transfiguration which preserves a differential relation between subject and object by virtue of its inconclusive claim to any universal truth or conceptual necessity. Similar to Nietzsche's inner pathos of distance between somatic drives and mental experience, Adorno describes how the subject may form affinities with particular sensuous objects through a spontaneous artistic response.

Adorno likens mimetic response to the sort of experimental empiricism that Francis Bacon understood by the phrase 'art of invention'.²² While not so much concerned with Bacon's inventive transfiguration of God's natural creations into objects of empirical knowledge, Adorno is concerned with the subject's affectively driven imaginative re-configuration of an object's significance. Here the affective contents of empirical experience are spontaneously, experimentally organised in a particular medium of expression, be it colour, sound, dance, or discursive utterance. In his early writings Adorno refers to mimetic response as 'exact imagination' -

An exact imagination ... that remains strictly confined to the material offered it by scholarship and science and goes beyond them only in the

²⁰ M. Cahn, 'Subversive Mimesis : T.W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique' in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory : An Interdisciplinary Approach* vol. 1. (ed.) M. Spariosu, Philadelphia and Amsterdam, Benjamin's Publishing Co., 1984, p.34.

²¹ F. Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' in *Philosophy and Truth : Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*. ed. and tr. by D. Breazale, New Jersey and London, Humanities Press, 1990, p.86. {Nietzsche's italics}

²² T.W. Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy' [1931] tr. B. Snow in *Telos* no.31, 1977, p.131.

smallest features of its arrangement, features which of course it must produce of itself.²³

Holding to the empirical limits of an object's appearance in the world, exact imagination at once brings into play an affectively driven transfiguration of that object. Adorno's concept of exact imagination 'points provocatively and explicitly to the relationship between exactness - reflecting a truth claim - and the imagination as the agency of a subjective and aconceptual experience'.²⁴ Adorno thereby rejects the conceptual *ratio's* identity of subject and object without leaving them, however, in a state of irreconcilable exclusion. While mimetic response may be just as well construed as intuition, this is no longer an intuition bound to any *a priori* conceptual *ratio*, but rather only to the free play of the imagination, where the object itself assumes primacy over subjective intention. Adorno's nonidentical affinity between subjective response and empirical exactness had been developed under the influence of Benjamin's anti-idealist attempt to let the object speak for itself. In what Benjamin and Adorno refer to as the infinite proximity of subject and object, the latter is explored in microscopic, affective detail. Yet the experiential primacy of the object comes to nothing without an imaginative, indeed aesthetic configuration of that same affective detail. The concept of exact imagination, as NicholSEN points out -

spans ... the dimension of form and the dimension of experience. It shows us that the primacy of the object is inseparable from reliance on genuine subjective experience, and that configuration is an activity of the subject as well as a feature of form.²⁵

In effect neither subject nor object have priority over the other. Similarly to Nietzsche, Adorno's understanding of the relation between affective and mental experience does not result in a reduction of the world to any fixed schema of *a priori* conceptual classification; nor does it reduce the world to a multiplicity of competing somatic drives. Nevertheless Adorno makes explicit what in Nietzsche is only an intimation of the negative dialectic of affective and mental experience. Without this negative dialectical reading, Nietzsche's position remains at best ambiguous, and at worst downright contradictory in the priority accorded both affective experience and belief.

²³ *Ibid.* Here, however, I have retained the translation of this passage offered by Shierry NicholSEN in her text *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, MIT, 1997, p.4.

²⁴ S. W. NicholSEN, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* op. cit., p.4.

Perspectival Knowledge and Genealogical Critique

If the transfiguring act of mimetic response is to be more than just subjective assertion, it will need the mediating force of critical self-reflection. This critical self-reflection no longer occurs, however, under the governance of any transcendental schematics or moral law, but through a constellation of rhetorically organised conceptual perspectives. In other words conceptual objectivity does not emerge through the rationalising procedure of a supreme cover concept, but rather through a paratactical constellation of conceptual perspectives.²⁶ This means that the rhetorical effects of language now form the possible limits of conceptual objectivity. For, as Adorno puts it -

Language offers no mere system of signs for cognitive functions. Where it appears essentially as a language, where it becomes a form of representation, it will not define its concepts. It lends objectivity to them by the relation into which it puts the concepts, centered about a thing.²⁷

Language is thus no longer considered a definitional means for transfixing conceptual meaning, but that through which conceptual logic respects the non-identity of its particular object of inquiry. Concepts thereby attain the potential to express the historical specificity of their object; a conceptually non-identical specificity, which remains blocked by the all too presumptuous act of 'rational' identification.

By themselves, constellations represent from without what the concept has cut away within : the 'more' which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being. By gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the object's interior. They attain in thinking what was necessarily excised from thinking.²⁸

A rhetorically organised constellation of perspectives has the potential capacity to reveal this specificity, or what has been 'excised from thinking', through the paratactical intersection of those multiple historical and social relations sedimented within the object under investigation.

Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object. As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

²⁶ Gillian Rose states in this regard: 'This is quite consistent with the idea that the object cannot be captured, and that a *set* of presentations may best approximate it. Adorno sometimes calls this a constellation, and he also describes this way of composing texts as 'paratactic', 'concentric', 'as a spider's web', and as 'a densely woven carpet'. *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* London and Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press, 1978, p.13. {Rose's italics}

²⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.162

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers.²⁹

While this constellation of conceptual perspectives objectively mediates mimetic response, the mediating influence of mimetic response, within what nonetheless remains an experimental risk in the production of meaning, is evident precisely through the rhetorical character of this paratactical constellation. Contrary to the universalising, reductive logic of the conceptual *ratio*, this rhetorical organisation of concepts thus involves the mutual, but non-identical mediation of self-reflective and affective experience. This mediation is made possible since language is not only the expressive medium of mimetic response, but equally that medium through which conceptual meaning is produced. Despite certain differences concerning the import of rhetoric and style, to which I shall soon turn, Adorno's linguistically arranged constellation of historical perspectives, has much in common with what Nietzsche understands by genealogical critique.

Nietzsche argued that on the basis of the plurality of the body's drives, we develop a multiplicity of conceptual perspectives, any one or constellation of which might constitute the grounds for a particular belief. Since our belief, formed from these perspectives, is itself said to determine the limits and possibilities of the body's affective experience, there would seem to be some room for arguing that Nietzsche, contrary to the above assertion, does indeed implicate a determining conceptual moment.³⁰ As indicated earlier, however, such belief and its conceptual articulation does not remain permanently fixed, since thought is continually re-determined by the body's affective drives; or, as Adorno translates it, by the body's changing affinities to particular objects. The nonidentical yet mutually mediating relation between belief and affective experience indicates that all knowledge is interpretation and hence perspectival. Thus, for both Nietzsche and Adorno, the rationalist claim to some trans-historical, absolute truth is altogether untenable. Indeed Nietzsche bluntly rejects the manner in which earlier philosophies presented the dualism of subject and object as a fixed or static antithesis, as unmediated things-in-themselves. With this in mind, he states -

There is no question of 'subject and object', but of a particular species of animal that can prosper only through a certain relative rightness: above all, regularity of its perceptions (so that it can

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁰ Cf. Nietzsche's claim cited on p.69 - footnote 19.

accumulate experience).³¹

Nietzsche also argues that the more affectively mediated conceptual perspectives brought to bear on a certain object, the more objective the knowledge of that object will be.³² Knowledge is thus no longer maintained in terms of some intrinsic truth-value pertaining to an object, but rather only as a constellation of affectively driven conceptual perspectives on that object. Similarly to Adorno, for Nietzsche the notion of conceptual objectivity is further qualified by way of reference to the history of those concepts used to describe an object. Articulating these historically laden conceptual perspectives, Nietzsche contends, would unlock the truth content of the particular object under review.

There are a number of interweaving perspectives at work, for example, in Nietzsche's text *On the Genealogy of Morals*. One is the historical ontology of master and slave, another the philologically explicated distinctions between good and evil, or again the perspective of Christian morality and cultural nihilism. A further perspective is that of style and life-affirmation. These perspectives come together as genealogical critique precisely because they trace the emergence and the historically changing social functions of moral values. In undertaking this critical history of morality, a genealogy of moral values, Nietzsche stresses the historical difference between the emergence of certain moral values and their changing function within European cultural life.

the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.³³

Hence the function or utility of moral values may be revealed only in light of the specific socio-historic practices or power relations that prevail at any given time. Access to these socio-historic practices, however, as Adorno also indicates, is only possible through the cultural artifacts of a particular period. These objects are no less than archaeological signs, perspectives, through which a particular culture's social customs may be read.

³¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, op. cit., §480, p.266. {Nietzsche's inverted comas and parenthesis}

³² F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* [1887] tr. W. Kaufmann, New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p.119.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.89. {Nietzsche's italics and inverted comas}

While these cultural objects provide at best an oblique, if not fragmented revelation of social practices, they are nevertheless also able to show, through the particular values inscribed within them, the then contemporary function of such values. Nietzsche's preferred artifact for uncovering the changing function of moral values is language. Through his philological studies of ancient Greek, Latin, and German, Nietzsche was able to reveal the changing psychological and social values at work within language referring particularly to relations of power, or what he otherwise portrays as an historical ontology of master/slave relations.

The distinction between master and slave moralities, which Nietzsche first introduced in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is given philological backing in his sequel *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In all three of the above-mentioned languages, terms synonymous with goodness and truth, such as virtue, purity, strength, and pride were used with specific reference to an aristocratic or ruling class. Terms of moral disapprobation, however, such as coward, vulgar, deceit, and mean, were aligned with a lower social class of slaves - what Nietzsche himself disparagingly refers to as the 'herd'. Nietzsche further discloses the distinction between master and slave moralities by way of terms associated with decisive action as against those of passivity and reaction. From this he claims that slave morality develops as a negative reaction to the values of the ruling class, where feelings of resentment and revenge are sublimated in the interests of self-preservation. With the fall of the Roman Empire, however, the slave morality of the Jews and early Christians displaced the noble values of the aristocratic class as the dominant system of values. At this time the sufferings of the slave class are revalued in a positive, creative fashion through the symbol of God's death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection. With the institutionalisation of Christianity, however, this creative function of slave morality gradually disappears. For the ascetic ideal, which had given strength to the early Christians, but which when transformed into a moral cult by the later Christian fetish for rational accountability, becomes infected with the disease of guilt. This Nietzsche draws out from the etymology of the German term 'Schuld' which carries both the sense of commercial debt and personal guilt. Love, pity and compassion, like the ascetic ideal, are also distorted, Nietzsche argues, through fear of offending the right thinking on these matters dogmatically espoused by the Christian church. Whereas the ascetic ideal had previously given a creative meaning to the otherwise apparent

purposelessness of suffering, now in the context of institutionalized Christianity and its ascetic priests -

it placed all suffering under the perspective of *guilt*. But all this notwithstanding - man was *saved* thereby, he possessed a *meaning*, ... he could now *will* something; ... *the will itself was saved*. ... man would rather will *nothingness* than *not will*.³⁴

In view of its own stifling guilt and fear of repudiation, however, the will now wills nothing but heavenly salvation. This will, with its attention directed towards salvation after death, is the negation of any self-creating, self-enhancing will to power in this earthly life. Nevertheless the nihilism or decadence of Christian morality with its life-denying insistence on metaphysical truth and heavenly equality, holds the seeds of its own undoing. For, as Nietzsche puts it -

After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its *most striking inference*, its inference *against* itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question "*what is the meaning of all will to truth?*"³⁵

With this self-conscious appraisal of what conditions the will to truth, namely the drive for power, Christian morality, Nietzsche contends, will begin to recognise its own untruth, and will react in desperate disarray. Through this historical critique Nietzsche develops a counter perspective which will lead, he contends, to the transvaluation of all values.

The dominant perspective of a self-mastering will to power, which brings these above mentioned historical perspectives together into an aesthetic whole, finds expression in what Nietzsche refers to as the 'grand style'.³⁶ Not only does this 'grand style' form the aesthetically organising principle of Nietzsche's constellation of moral perspectives, but its right of passage lies also in its capacity to be immediately life enhancing. Adorno, somewhat similarly, considers the organising principle of conceptual perspectives as rhetorical emphasis, albeit in the name of a social critique that is only indirectly life-enhancing, and which does not depend on a somatically driven will to self-mastery. Despite these significant differences, it is clear that, for both philosophers, the rhetorical play or style of language not only preserves within it the mimetic response of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.162-63. {Nietzsche's italics}

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.161. {Nietzsche's italics}

³⁶ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, op. cit., §842, pp.443-444. For a further discussion of style in Nietzsche see Alan Schrift's *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990.

the aesthetically transfiguring subject, but also gives form to the constellation of conceptual perspectives. As noted previously however, with Nietzsche, style produces 'true knowledge' only in so far as it has an immediate life-enhancing capacity; that is, in so far as it nourishes an individual's will to power. According to Nietzsche, a style that does not affirm a pragmatic path to self-creative transformation remains afflicted with the signs of suffering and decadence. In Nietzsche's words, 'Knowledge', if it is to be true and effective, 'works as a tool of power'.³⁷

Nietzsche's first major delineation of this position may be found in his essay 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life'.³⁸ Here Nietzsche questions the then contemporary preoccupation with what he calls the monumental and antiquarian approaches to historical knowledge. Monumental history serves to immortalize the past while the antiquarian approach adds to that the attempt to recover lost origins. Nietzsche's principal objection is that since both these forms of historical knowledge are preoccupied entirely with the past, they devalue the present historical context and so demonstrate a disregard for life as it is lived now. Instead of preserving the past in an impotent gesture of pious glorification, Nietzsche now proposes what he calls the undertaking of critical history. For critical history, or what is later articulated as genealogical critique, looks to the injustices of the past which persist in the present, and seeks to dissolve this historical inheritance through the development of new habits or ways of living in the world. Only a knowledge that enhances our will to power in this way is worthy of the epithet 'true knowledge'.

Will to Power and Eternal Recurrence

The negative dialectical reading of Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be carried further with any plausibility. The main reason for this being that Nietzsche's overcoming of modernity's moral nihilism through the exercise of an autonomous will to power and a faith in the principle of eternal recurrence reverts to an Hegelian-like positivity, albeit now in the form of an anthropological monism.³⁹ What signals the overcoming of modern

³⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, op. cit., §480, pp.266-267.

³⁸ F. Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' [1874] in *Untimely Meditations* tr. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1983.

³⁹ Walter Kaufmann also draws this parallel between Hegel and Nietzsche in terms of their notion of overcoming in his text *Nietzsche : Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Cleveland and New York, Meridian, 1966. Despite their many differences, which Kaufmann explicates, he also states, "The decisive point of Nietzsche's cosmology ... can be expressed in two words : Nietzsche was a *dialectical monist*. ...

nihilism is Nietzsche's overman, the *Übermensch*, who self-reflexively transvalues the life-denying powers of the religious priest as now life-affirming, and who thereby creates himself as a new cultural icon - the master of autonomy. Nietzsche elucidates the path of autonomy through his fictional character Zarathustra. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the belief in morality and rational truth are parodied as a thoroughgoing immorality and irrational absurdity. The transvaluation of both these cultural conditions results in an aesthetic evaluation of truth, which at once transposes the question of morality into one of ethical self-management. Life is thus imaginatively transfigured as a self-creative work of art where the more romantic Dionysian impulse supersedes the otherwise classical circumspection of Apollo.⁴⁰

This transfiguration of life as art, Nietzsche argues, involves a certain measure of forgetfulness in order to escape the paralysing vicissitudes of historical experience, and so transcend the traditional moral values of good and evil in the interests of a personally orchestrated rank order of values. Here the mediating force of socio-historic practices and genealogical critique are discarded in a supra-perspectival faith where the artist of life withdraws into the solitary incommunicable truth of his own inner aesthetic self.⁴¹ Instead of descending from his cave as the self-empowered ascetic priest to teach the 'herd' the art of rising to this highest 'order of rank', Zarathustra climbs upward to become an exemplar of the art of self-transfiguration. Having mocked an earlier descent to the people, where, like Socrates, he could not rid himself of the disjunction between an affirmative discourse on life and the life-denying nihilism of life amongst the herd, Zarathustra opts finally for an ideal condition of solitude. Yet the existential impossibility of this self-willed isolation also becomes the target of self-directed ridicule.

Has a man ever caught fish on high mountains? And even though what I want and do up here be folly, it is still better than if I became solemn down there from waiting, and green and yellow - a swaggering wrathsnoter from waiting, a holy, howling storm out of the mountains, an impatient one who shouts down into the valleys, 'Listen or I shall

The Latin word in question, *sublimare*, however, means - in German - *aufheben*, and Nietzsche's sublimation actually involves, no less than does Hegel's *aufheben*, a simultaneous preserving, canceling, and lifting up." pp204-205. {Kaufmann's italics}

⁴⁰ Contrary to the dialectical balance of the Apollinian and Dionysian principles evident in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche later views the artist of life as primarily Dionysian in attitude. Cf. *Twilight of the Idols* [1888] tr. W. Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* §6, p.484 and *The Will to Power* op. cit., §1041, p.536.

⁴¹ Support for this view may be found in Jay Bernstein's 'Autonomy and Solitude' in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought* ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, London, Routledge, 1991; and in Ted Sadler's 'The Postmodern Politicization of Nietzsche' in *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, ed. P. Patton. Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1993.

whip you with the scourge of God!'.⁴²

Zarathustra knows his own pretentious posturing as high ascetic priest to be nothing more than 'pissing against the idealist wind', as Peter Sloterdijk comments in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁴³

The impossibility of Zarathustra's position is just that which Nietzsche refers to as the stance of radical nihilism. The significance of radical nihilism, of the will to truth and self-transfiguration as *Übermensch*, is tragedy.

Radical nihilism is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; ... This realization is a consequence of the cultivation of 'truthfulness' - thus itself a consequence of the faith in morality.⁴⁴

Zarathustra's self-directed parody demonstrates a consciousness of extreme individuation as the harbinger of tragic suffering; an individuation, however, which, as evidenced in early Greek tragic drama, also held out the possibility of transcending that suffering through the joyful dissolution of individuality within a communal, Dionysian affirmation of life's boundless possibilities. While in his early text *The Birth of Tragedy*, this Dionysian celebration is restrained by an Apollinian sense of order and balance, in his later works the cosmological chaos of the Dionysian is set free from its dialectical mediation by the Apollinian principle of beauty.⁴⁵ Here the will to power of the *Übermensch* is at one with the Dionysian cosmos, where all forms of life are a positive expression of this will to power. A sense of Dionysian community is just that which enables Zarathustra to withstand the terrifying implications of his radical nihilism. A sense of this community, which belies any linguistic or conceptual presentation, Nietzsche argues, is achieved only through a faith in the doctrine of eternal recurrence. The extent of our ability to adopt the faith of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche continues, is a measure of our will to become *Übermensch*.

Having faith in the principle of eternal recurrence is having faith in the will's unflagging capacity for self-affirmation despite the tragic implications of radical nihilism. Heidegger argues that Nietzsche's faith in eternal recurrence is an attempt to give permanence and stability to what is otherwise the eternal chaos of fate and Heraclitean becoming. Heidegger defends this interpretation by citing Nietzsche's

⁴² F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in op. cit., p.351.

⁴³ P. Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, tr. M. Eldred, London and New York, Verso, 1988, p.103

⁴⁴ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, op. cit., §3, p.9.

statement that '[t]o impress the character of Being on Becoming - that is *the highest will to power*'.⁴⁶ Heidegger further argues that Nietzsche's notion of Being, as the highest will to power, thereby remains ensnared in just that instrumental metaphysics which it otherwise claimed to overcome. Deleuze later argues that Heidegger's response to Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence fails to take account of the irony inherent in Nietzsche's proclamation. For this doctrine, in its resemblance to Kant's categorical imperative, is just that which Nietzsche sets out to parody. From this perspective, eternal recurrence in no way indicates that permanent metaphysical law of Being which Heidegger reads into it. What recurs, what is repeated, Deleuze maintains, is only the perpetual sameness of an otherwise indeterminate becoming. Indeed what recurs is not the same identical Being of becoming, but an ontological 'Chaosmos' of univocal, pure dissimilarity. What appears 'the same' in Nietzsche's eternal recurrence is, according to Deleuze, an 'inevitable illusion'.

The same and the similar are fictions engendered by the eternal return. This time, there is no longer error but *illusion*: inevitable illusion which is the source of error, but may nevertheless be distinguished from it.⁴⁷

Deleuze nevertheless struggles against this semblance or illusion of the recurring identity of the will in his ontologically sanctified affirmation of perpetual difference. Indeed in the name of an embodied plane of interweaving pluralities and becoming, he claims to dissolve the appearance of identity in Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. Despite Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence as unmediated difference, however, the simulacra of difference and repetition nevertheless simulate identity or what is the negation of difference as an unavoidable aspect of its functioning.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See footnote 41.

⁴⁶ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §617, cited by Heidegger in 'Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?' [1954] tr. B. Magnus in *Review of Metaphysics* vol.20, 1967, p.426.

⁴⁷ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* op. cit., p.126. {Deleuze's italics}

⁴⁸ Lutz Ellrich makes this point in 'Negativity and Difference : On Gilles Deleuze's Criticism of Dialectics', tr. M. Picker in *Modern Language Notes* vol.III, no.3, 1996. He says, "... repetition avails itself of its own self-generated simulacral illusion in order to double its affirmation of that which differs ... With this, however, a negative element and/or an internally and reflexively constituted identical element smuggles itself into self-referential difference, indeed as an agency of mediation. Evidently, affirmation is capable of doubling itself only by virtue of negativity and/or identity obtained from self-referential negativity." p.486. Similarly both Mandelbrot's fractal geometry and Penrose's non-periodic tiling, which function according to a principle of indeterminate difference, ultimately reveal, whether in the spatial intensity of micro or macroscopic perspectives, recurring identical patterns.

Adorno interprets Nietzsche's faith in eternal recurrence as an 'image of eternity modeled on endless repetition';⁴⁹ a repetition, which, while always different in its specific social manifestations, is nevertheless equally fateful in its tragic implications. Eternal recurrence refers not just to a recurring will to power, but to a recurring fate through which the former acquires its self-affirming meaning. In effect the eternal recurrence of fate, Nietzsche's *amor fati*, is nothing less than 'the absolute sanctioning of an infinity of ... sacrifice'.⁵⁰ Nietzsche's positive valorisation of fate through a self-affirming will to power is at once a secular version of that life-denying attitude of sheer compliance with the social order fostered by Christianity, and of which Nietzsche had been so justly critical.

We might well ask whether we have more reason to love what happens to us, to affirm what is because it is, than to believe true what we hope. Is it not the same false inference that leads from the existence of stubborn facts to their erection as the highest value, as [Nietzsche] criticizes in the leap from hope to truth? If he consigns 'happiness through an *idée fixe*' to the lunatic asylum, the origin of *amor fati* might be sought in a prison. Love of stone walls and barred windows is the last resort of someone who sees and has nothing else to love. Both are cases of the same ignominious adaptation which, in order to endure the world's horror, attributes reality to wishes and meaning to senseless compulsion.⁵¹

What is equally disturbing in Nietzsche's account of the relation between fate and the *Übermensch*'s will to power is that the latter, as a fully self-reflexive, self-creative work of art, also transfigures the determining heteronomy of social relations into a condition that has been altogether self-willed. Accepting responsibility for one's own fate in this way now effectively obscures the coercive social relations without which the claim to freedom would itself disappear. For this reason the actualisation of freedom, Adorno argues, does not simply depend on the adherence to a personally orchestrated rank order of values.

Heteronomously posited like Nietzsche's 'New Tables', they would be the opposite of freedom. But freedom need not remain what it was, and what it arose from. Ripening, rather, in the internalisation of social coercion into conscience with the resistance to social authority which critically measures that

⁴⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* [1933], tr. R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.82.

⁵⁰ T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* [1951], tr. E. Jephcott, London and New York, Verso, 1993, p.98.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* {Adorno's italics and inverted comas}

authority by its own principles, is a potential that would rid [humanity] of coercion. In the critique of conscience, the rescue of this potential is envisioned - not in the psychological realm, however, but in the objectivity of a reconciled life of the free.⁵²

Once again, albeit now through Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, there is evidence of an unspoken complicity with the already existing status quo or with whatever forms of social coercion may come to pass. As Adorno points out, however, this would be the very opposite of freedom. Indeed an individual carrying through a program of ethical self-management is all the more fatefully determined by heteronomous relations of social power the less this determining influence is acknowledged.

Adorno also takes issue with Nietzsche's self-reflexive technique of parody. For the parody of master/slave relations in modern culture does nothing more than mimic that same moral positivism of which it claims to be critical. Nietzsche's self-reflexive parody is nothing short of a transfiguration of the Hegelian negation of negation into an affirmation of affirmation where there is no longer any objective, mediating resistance. Fate becomes a self-willed stage prop, a dramatic occasion for re-affirming the self's will to power. What is parodied simply re-appears as the will to power of yet another ascetic priest; one dependent on nothing but the illusory absoluteness of its own self-mastery. Having otherwise deployed genealogical critique against the nihilist attitudes prevalent in modern culture, Nietzsche compromises that critique through a self-affirming faith in eternal recurrence.

Ideology lies in wait for the mind which delights in itself like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, for the mind which all but irresistibly becomes an absolute to itself. Theory prevents this. It corrects the naive self-confidence of the mind without obliging it to sacrifice its spontaneity at which theory aims in its turn. For the difference between the so-called subjective part of mental experience and its object will not vanish by any means, as witness the necessary and painful exertions of the knowing subject. ... Theory and mental experience need to interact.... Both attitudes of consciousness are linked by criticizing one another, not by compromising.⁵³

Theory's capacity to critically expose the social condition of unfreedom and its ideological supports is undermined in what becomes the positivity of self-affirmation. The mediation of mental experience, or what is an affectively driven mimetic response, by a discriminating conceptual *ratio* needs to be maintained, Adorno argues, despite that

⁵² T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.275.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

ratio's universalising, essentialist implications. Certainly what the concept intimates in the act of naming remains an ephemeral, if not illusory truth; yet this truth, when neglected, would signal the disappearance of the hope for freedom and social solidarity.

Agonistic Politics and Art

Nietzsche argues that while the social institution of moral values effected by the modern liberal State assures its constituents of their equality before the law, such democratic leveling also severely weakens their capacity for a self-reflexive will to freedom.

Liberal institutions cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained: later on, there are no worse and no more thorough injurers of freedom than liberal institutions. Their effects are known well enough : they undermine the will to power; they level mountain and valley, and call that morality; they make men small, cowardly, and hedonistic - every time it is the herd animal that triumphs with them. Liberalism : in other words, herd-animalization.⁵⁴

Nietzsche nevertheless concedes that in the fight for liberal institutions, in the war for democratic freedom, those fighting were indeed free. He elucidates this point with the following question and answer.

For what is freedom? That one has the will to assume responsibility for oneself. That one maintains the distance which separates us. ... The human being who has *become free* ... spits on the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shop keepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen and other democrats. The free man is a *warrior*.⁵⁵

The will to power exercised by this free warrior does not involve a will to power over others. The will to power over others is just that which Nietzsche attributes to the Christian church and the modern state apparatus. Rather the will to freedom, for Nietzsche, takes the form of an agonistic politics where victory is won through a self-disciplinary transgression of guilt and resentment; that is, through an individual's living beyond the moral nihilism which pervades the culture of modernity. This is the moment of the *Übermensch* who pushes against the historical limits of h/er times with an exemplary morality. The political attitude which best describes this agonistic practice of freedom, Nietzsche continues, is aristocratic.

⁵⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *op. cit.*, §38, p.541.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.542. {Nietzsche's italics}

The political dimension of Nietzsche's simulacrum of will to power and eternal recurrence, a relation which constitutes the self-reflexive autonomy of the *Übermensch*, may thus be interpreted as an anti-liberal, agonistic politics. Yet there are aspects of liberal politics that remain clearly evident in what Nietzsche articulates as the probity or integrity of the *Übermensch*, and to which a number of commentators have drawn attention.⁵⁶ Arguing for a notion of liberal justice and community well-being, David Owen also shows up the *ethos* of strong free market competition at work in Nietzsche's agonism. Moreover, Nietzsche's understanding of the individual's relation to the State, not dissimilarly to Hegel, is just that espoused by contemporary Capitalist State administrations. While Nietzsche's comments refer to an educational context of self-improvement in ancient Greece, the return of this *ethos* in modern economic and political practices is unmistakable.

Nietzsche argues that Hellenic education was based on the idea that our capacities only develop through struggle, whereby the goal of this agonistic education is the well-being of the *polis*: 'For example, every Athenian was to develop himself through competition, to the degree that this self was of most use to Athens and would cause least damage'. ... Thus, on Nietzsche's account, the public culture of Greek society cultivated human powers through an institutionalised *ethos* of contestation in which citizens strove to surpass each other and, ultimately, to set new standards of nobility.⁵⁷

Agonistic politics thereby supports economic liberal conceptions of the state and justice in the name of competitive excellence and autonomy. In direct contrast to the anti-liberal perspective, it may also be argued then that Nietzsche's agonism is just that self-affirming ideology through which the capitalist mode of economic exchange attempts to preserve itself. Contemporary examples of this agonism are most evident in the socio-cultural spheres of business and sport. This sets up the aporia of a nihilism, which is and is not yet overcome.

⁵⁶ The view that 'integrity' constitutes the supreme moral quality of the *Übermensch* finds support in the otherwise divergent writings of Jean-Luc Nancy, Jay Bernstein, and David Owen. See Nancy's 'Our Probity!' On Truth in the Moral Sense in Nietzsche' in L.A. Rickels (ed.), *Looking after Nietzsche*, Albany, SUNY, 1990; Bernstein's 'Autonomy and Solitude' in K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, London, Routledge, 1991; and Owen's *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994.

⁵⁷ D. Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1995, p.139. Owen cites Nietzsche's 'Homer on Competition' tr. C. Diethe in *On the Genealogy of Morality [and other essays]*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, Cambridge, CUP, 1994, p.192.

Rejecting any utopian, metaphysical interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Magnus, Nehamas, and Higgins argue that faith in eternal recurrence indicates a pragmatic attitude through which contemporary nihilism is indeed overcome here and now.⁵⁸ As Magnus puts it, the attitude of integrity is 'the expression of nihilism already overcome'.⁵⁹ Having faith in eternal recurrence involves an intense concentration on the present, similar to that experienced, Higgins argues, when engaged in musical performance.⁶⁰ While events or situations may repeat themselves in some measure, and are thus not altogether forgotten, what is most critical, for this pragmatic perspective, is our attitude within the ever-changing, affective eternity of the present moment. When our attitude is one of integrity, with a joyous faith in life, even in the face of terrible suffering, this is what Nietzsche portrays as the transvaluation of nihilism by the *Übermensch*. The psychological difficulty with this position, however, is that the responsibility for incessantly creating ourselves through every moment brings with it an unbearable burden, and yet to deny this responsibility would deny the life-affirming attitude for which we struggle.⁶¹ A social, political and philosophical difficulty with this pragmatic position is that it carries a necessary submission to the ontological dictates of an indiscriminate, yet self-willed fate and its tragic injustices. In Deleuze's unequivocally Nietzschean 'celebration of ontological injustice', in the affirmation of an absolutely differential becoming there remains an indelible passivity, a necessary surrender to the tragic forces of a self-incurred fate.⁶² What here remains equivocal, however, is an axiological identity of positive self-affirmation and self-denial; an equivocation which sits at the heart of Nietzsche's faith in eternal recurrence.

When divorced from the liberal, democratic principles of justice and equality, when hierarchical and aristocratic, the agonistic politics of autonomy tendentially transfigures the will to power over oneself into a will to power over others, albeit in the name of the State's own political and economic self-enhancement.⁶³ The prime political examples of this in modern history are Napoleon and Hitler. Even when the agonistic politics of autonomy are considered in terms of a literary enterprise, where Goethe takes

⁵⁸ B. Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, Bloomington, Indiana State U.P., 1978. A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge Mass. and London, Harvard U.P., 1985. K. Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Philadelphia, Temple U.P., 1987.

⁵⁹ B. Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* op. cit., p.142.

⁶⁰ K. Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, op. cit., p180ff.

⁶¹ M. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* tr. M.H. Heim, New York, Harper and Row, 1984.

⁶² G. Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984, p.108.

exemplary status, this again does not so much involve a responsibility to others as moral agents, but rather a universal responsibility for them as moral patients.⁶⁴ The aporetic form of eternal recurrence for these political and cultural figureheads nevertheless remains tied to the duality of ‘creator and creature’, a dilemma whose *pathos* -

enforces solitude, mask, and irony. ... Eternal return [thus] raises to a historico-metaphysical fate the very duality between creator and creature, activity and passivity, self and world that it was designed to overcome. Nietzsche’s radicalization of Kantian autonomy terminates in the worldless, death-in-life solitude of the philosopher-legislator. That solitude reveals autonomy as an empty social ideal since it is solitude with its remorseless self-overcomings that is the truth of eternal return rather than any content that the philosopher-hermit might create and legislate.⁶⁵

In becoming exemplars of autonomy, of agonistic self-overcoming, the high priests of radical nihilism will upon themselves the unbearable fate of solitude. These political and cultural artists of creation remain bound by an exemplary freedom which condemns them to an inner life of solitude, and which they know at once to be a self-incurred failure in self overcoming. Nietzsche’s agonistic politics thereby reveals what Pecora describes as ‘the exemplary figure of *damaged individual life thrown back upon its own isolation and political failure*’.⁶⁶

The life of Nietzsche’s fictional character Zarathustra represents just that image of tragic isolation to which Adorno alludes in the sub-title of *Minima Moralia* - ‘Reflections from Damaged Life’.⁶⁷ Adorno, however, does not attempt to revalue his own isolation and morally damaged life through its aesthetic transfiguration as an ongoing work of art. There are two reasons for this. Firstly he considered Nietzsche’s somatically driven aesthetics to be a form of ‘biological idealism’.⁶⁸ For the existential leap beyond genealogical critique transfigures the latter as nothing more than the metaphorical transcription of a somatic drive to self-mastery. This cuts short the manner in which historically sedimented practices continue to determine the limits and possibilities of this somatic drive. Autonomy, with Nietzsche, emerges finally with the

⁶³ D. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity* op. cit., pp.78-83.

⁶⁴ J. Bernstein, ‘Autonomy and Solitude’ in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, op. cit., 1991, p.212.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.213-214.

⁶⁶ V. Pecora, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, Critical Theory’ in *New German Critique* no.53, 1991, p.114.
{Pecora’s italics}

⁶⁷ T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* op. cit.

historically unrestrained fulfilment of the body's will to power. Certainly there are passages that clearly contradict this claim, yet it is from these that a negative dialectical reading of the will to power attains its cogency.⁶⁹ The second reason for Adorno not pursuing what he calls Nietzsche's 'metaphysics of the artist',⁷⁰ this existential identity of life and art, is Nietzsche's fixation on the conventional art of the beautiful.⁷¹ Nietzsche stresses furthermore that a life-affirming will to power is necessarily beautiful.⁷² As Adorno points out, however -

Nietzsche's defence of conventions ... rings false because he misinterpreted conventions literally as agreements arbitrarily established and existing at the mercy of volition. Because he overlooked the sedimented social compulsion in conventions and attributed them to pure play, he was equally able to trivialize or defend them with the gesture of "Precisely!" This is what brought his genius, which was superior in its differentiation to that of all his contemporaries, under the influence of aesthetic reaction; ultimately he was no longer able to distinguish levels of form. The postulate of the particular has the negative aspect of serving the reduction of aesthetic distance and thereby joining forces with the status quo.⁷³

Nietzsche's identity of art and life as a self-styled agonism of beauty undermines the value of autonomous artworks as the site of mimetic shudder and an unspoken utopian critique. Utopian critique cannot be reproduced in life as a self-reflexive autonomy without falling back into the hopeless condition of sheer self-affirmation, of a desperate self-overcoming, a pathogenic paranoia, whose resulting madness it is otherwise meant to overcome. Here 'the ritual of the domination of nature', as Adorno puts it, 'lives on in play'.⁷⁴ With Nietzsche's attempt to transfigure life as a work of art, the social and historical content of autonomous art is deprived of its utopian truth content - as that

⁶⁸ T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p.97. For a similar argument see Andrew Bowie's *Aesthetics and Subjectivity : from Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester and New York, MUP, 1993, pp.244-252.

⁶⁹ Apart from the discussion earlier in this section, see again Andrew Bowie's *Aesthetics and Subjectivity : from Kant to Nietzsche*, op. cit., pp.250-251.

⁷⁰ T.W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* 2 vols., tr. S.W. NicholSEN, New York, Columbia U.P., 1991, vol. 1, p.107.

⁷¹ Nietzsche states "Beauty" is for the artist something outside all orders of rank, because in beauty opposites are tamed; the highest sign of power, namely power over opposites; moreover, without tension' and 'The ugly, i.e., the contradiction to art, that which is excluded from art, ... The effect of the ugly is depressing : it is the expression of a depression'. *The Will to Power* op. cit., §803 and §809, pp.422, 427.

⁷² Nietzsche states 'Nothing is beautiful, except man alone : all aesthetics rests upon this naïveté, which is its first truth. Let us immediately add the second : nothing is ugly except the degenerating man - and with this the realm of aesthetic judgement is circumscribed'. *Twilight of the Idols* in op. cit., §20, p.526.

⁷³ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.204.

which points beyond the debilitating conditions of contemporary nihilism without repeating this condition in a life-style parody of it. Hence, interpreting art as ‘the real task of life, ... as life’s *metaphysical* activity’,⁷⁵ Nietzsche fails to distinguish between the utopian moment of social freedom in autonomous art and the ideological lie of an agonistic freedom whose conservative aesthetic of beauty reinforces the reifying effects of capitalist consumer culture. For just this reason Pecora describes Nietzsche’s prophetic cure for nihilism as ‘a shaman’s medicine’, ‘a talismanic antidote’.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁷⁵ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* op. cit., §853, p.453.

⁷⁶ V. Pecora, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, Critical Theory’ in *New German Critique*, op. cit., pp109, 112.

C2)

DEATH AND ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE : HEIDEGGER

Introduction

Heidegger claims to open the way to thinking the essence of human existence in a manner otherwise concealed throughout the history of Western philosophy, from Plato to Nietzsche. Whether clothed in the conceptual garb of reason or some form of moral will, philosophy had never been able to think Being as Being; and this since it never sought to reveal the nature of Being except as a metaphysical totality of beings in the world. This specifically metaphysical Being was that to which particular beings owed their existence, and within which they all co-existed. Being had been thought both as the ontological ground of all worldly beings and equally as the divine creator, the determining theological essence of such beings. Western philosophy thereby constituted itself, Heidegger purports, as an onto-theological unity in which the relation of Being and beings is postulated as an inclusive identity achieved through the supra-sensuous or metaphysical will of Being. Yet this ‘belonging together of man and Being’ had been always dependent on their conceptually postulated difference. Heidegger objects to this conceptual fabrication of the differential belonging together foisted on Being and beings, since both, he maintains, are already distinctively present in their duality before conceptual thought misguidedly assigns that difference to them.

Whenever we come to the place to which we were supposedly first bringing difference along as an alleged contribution, we always find that Being and beings in their difference are already there. It is as in Grimm’s fairytale *The Hedgehog and the Hare*: “I’m here already”. ... Being and beings are always found to be already there by virtue of and within the difference.¹

Hence what remains altogether unthought in the onto-theologic unity of Western metaphysics is its own originating condition, or what Heidegger otherwise articulates as the still forgotten, and so concealed, ontological difference between the totality of Being and beings. It is this as yet unrevealed ontological difference which is the truth of Being.

¹ M. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* [1957] tr. J. Stambaugh, New York, Evanston, and London, Harper and Row, 1969, pp.62-63. {Heidegger’s italics}

What is at stake here for the question of freedom is that freedom is no longer a condition created by human subjects. Rather freedom, Heidegger maintains, is an essential letting-be of Being in its truth, such that the human entity is free only through its ontological participation in the truth of Being.

Being free in this way points to the hitherto uncomprehended nature of freedom. The overt character of behaviour in the sense that it makes rightness a possibility, is grounded in freedom. *The essence of truth is freedom.*²

In effect freedom, for Heidegger, is nothing short of a revelation of ontological difference, of the truth of Being as it exists independently of human existence. It is precisely this independence of Being, which, as Heidegger indicates in his 'Letter on Humanism', had not found adequate expression in *Being and Time*.³ This reversal or turning, Adorno argues, involves a claim to the priority of Being over human existence;⁴ a claim, which Heidegger acknowledges he could not then make good, but which had always been his intention. Nevertheless it needs be remembered that Heidegger did not consider this reversal as in any sense a rejection or critique of *Being and Time*. What this 'turning' signifies is no more than a shift in perspective away from the experience of human *Dasein* to that of Being itself. Heidegger's 'turning' first becomes evident in his 'On the Essence of Truth' where 'the nature of freedom ... now shows itself as an "exposition" into the revealed nature of what-is',⁵ namely the independence of Being from beings in the world. Accordingly, when it comes to the question of freedom, Heidegger adamantly rejects the idea that freedom is in any way dependent on human being.

Resistance to the proposition that the essence of truth is freedom is rooted in prejudices, the most obstinate of which contends that freedom is a property of man and that the nature of freedom neither needs nor allows of further questioning. As for man, we all know what *he* is.⁶

In short 'man' for Heidegger is nothing but a capricious vessel of untruths, a 'wavering reed' whose weakness is all too evident in the metaphysical and technological delusions of self-appropriation.

² M. Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth' [1930] tr. R.F.C. Hull and A. Crick in *Existence and Being* ed. W. Brock, London, Vision, 1949, p.330. {Heidegger's italics}

³ M. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism' [1947] tr. E. Lohner in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* 4 vols., eds. W. Barrett and H. Aiken, New York, Random, 1962, vol.3, p.280.

⁴ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966]] tr. E. Ashton, New York, Continuum, 1990, p.116 footnote.

⁵ M. Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Truth' in *op. cit.*, p.334. {Heidegger's inverted commas}

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.332. {Heidegger's italics}

Metaphysics and Technology

Heidegger traces the emergence of metaphysics from the growing divergence between poetic and conceptual styles of thinking most apparent, he argues, in the historical shift from Presocratic philosophy to that of Plato and Aristotle. Conceptual thinking attains its first decisive formulation in Plato's notion of Being as *idea*. Plato's *idea*, while still retaining some sense of the Greek term *aletheia*, as a revealing of what is otherwise hidden, as a bringing to light the essential presence of what is present, nevertheless diminishes this sense of poetic truth in favour of a correct recognition and evaluation of beings. Rejecting Plato's external relation of the *idea* to beings, Aristotle conceives the presence of Being in terms of *energeia* or moving force within the *idea* and beings themselves. In postulating this higher third as the determining essence of *idea* and beings, Aristotle strengthens Plato's notion of truth as propositional correctness, as an adequate correspondence or likeness between *idea* and those beings which are named or brought to actuality in the proposition. What this change in the essence of truth occasions, and which dominates the subsequent history of metaphysics, is a revaluation of thinking in terms of causality, where thinking now serves to produce or make possible all existent beings in their truth and reality.

The term *logos*, which for the Presocratics had named the presence of Being, has now been devalued in its significance to indicate a propositional logic, a theoretical technique for determining the truth or knowledge of beings in the world. Christian religious culture translated Aristotle's *energeia* as God. With Descartes the Christian God is still viewed as the ultimate causal force directing the world, as that which is most actual. However Descartes also draws out the essence of that propositional truth first developed by Plato and Aristotle as the certainty of an individual self-consciousness regarding its underlying presence in all acts of conscious representation. What appears here for the first time is a definite confrontation between a perceiving subject and an object perceived. As Leibniz then points out, since the individual act of object representation (*perceptio*) cannot make present to itself at any one time all the objects present in the world, it at once involves a desire (*appetitio*) for new and other perceptions. The particular perspective of an individual consciousness thus wills or brings into being further object representations through such desire. The monadic unity of 'perceptio' and 'appetitio', in which the self-certain, desiring subject becomes both the

authority for propositional truth and the driving reality or will effecting what is real, has now become the ontological ground for what Heidegger calls the final phase of metaphysics. Being has become a unified self-conscious will, a will that is later presented in various metaphysical forms by Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Being as the will to will, as the essence of all individual willing, still answers the question posed by Leibniz, as to why there is something and not rather nothing, in terms of what constitutes the ground of beings in the world.

Nietzsche brings the history of Western metaphysics to a close, Heidegger contends, with his notion of the human will to power as the essential ground of the totality of beings. What culminates in Nietzsche's philosophy, Heidegger maintains, is an instrumental nihilism resulting from what Nietzsche correctly indicates in cultural terms as the death of God. Heidegger translates this cultural condition as the homelessness of beings in the destiny of Being's oblivion. Human life has lost all meaning, he continues, in its inability to think its own essence. The species is threatened not only by a metaphysics preoccupied with its attempt to understand the beingness of beings through a morally value-laden will, but with a modern technological instrumentalism whose scientific rationalism pays no regard whatever to the need for revealing its own essence. Indeed, 'The expression [technology]', Heidegger states, 'may serve as a term for the metaphysics of the atomic age'.⁷ For like metaphysics, technology is concerned primarily with unlocking the hidden potential of natural objects in order the better to accommodate those objects to the driving desire of the human will. Technology is a means to an end for human self-preservation - this is its commonly accepted essence, but one that needs to be questioned, in Heidegger's view, the more technology assumes a dangerous independence beyond the formative limits of human control.

From Heidegger's perspective this does not mean, however, that humanity must reassert some more developed form of mastery over it, but that we need to rethink technology in a way that no longer considers it solely as a means to an end. Once again Heidegger turns for support to the ancient Greek understanding of nature (*physis*) and its production. This 'bringing-forth' into nature, as Heidegger puts it, and as understood by Plato in the *Symposium*, is essentially *poiesis*, a revealing which lays before us the unconcealed truth (*aletheia*) of what has come into existence. Now since the Greek word

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.52.

techne, to which our current term 'technology' belongs, refers just as much to the special skills of craftspeople as it does to those techniques involved in producing fine art and philosophy, Heidegger argues that *techne* was originally understood as a form of *poiesis*. Moreover, Heidegger continues, since *techne* was also intimately connected with the term *episteme*, and hence understood not simply as production but also as knowing, then *techne* again shows its link with that sense of revealing (*aletheia*) to which we have just referred. Despite the apparent vaguery of these philological relations, Heidegger concludes that -

what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth.⁸

Modern technology, by way of contrast, Heidegger argues, does not so much reveal nature in any poetic sense but sets upon it in the manner of a provocative challenge, regarding it as a 'standing-reserve' of energy which may be put to use on command. Humanity is equally challenged to carry out the task of ordering and regulating the 'standing-reserve', and in so far as it carries out this role, Heidegger claims, does not itself become part of that reserve. This technological destiny of nature and humanity, this 'enframing', as Heidegger calls it, not only conceals its devastating claim on both, but also thereby veils the possibility of that other form of revealing understood by the early Greeks. While the potentially world destructive capacity of technology has brought extreme danger, what is more dangerous, according to Heidegger, is the seeming inability to think the essence of humanity's technological destiny. Yet in the enduring presence of that destiny, Heidegger continues, there arises a saving power that grants humanity the role of 'the one who is needed and used for the safe-keeping of the coming to presence of truth'.⁹ This power of deliverance into truth constitutes the essence of technology. Such truth may reveal itself, as both Plato and more recently Hölderlin have indicated, in the realm of the poetic; or as Heidegger puts it, in those arts which open themselves to the path of poetic revelation.

Only by 'stepping back' from the metaphysical and technological mode of thinking, which posits some form of subjective consciousness or pragmatic will as the

⁸ M. Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology' [1954] in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. W. Lovitt, New York and London, Garland, 1977, p.13. {Heidegger's italics}

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.33.

ground of all that exists, may the truth of Being begin to show itself in the light of its own concealment. For while metaphysics and technology continually move within the domain of Being, they do so as the very veil hiding Being's enduring presence. The thinking that opens itself to this more original foundation of beingness and being, that opens itself to their ontological difference before all theoretical and practical explications, is the recollection of Being as pure existence, as Being. Such recollection, as Heidegger points out, effects nothing in the 'standing-reserve', for it is the non-conceptual, non-referential poetic contemplation of what is. More essentially, Heidegger points out, such contemplation without a referential object is the thought of Nothing. 'Because it thinks Being, thought thinks the Nothing'.¹⁰ While Heidegger indicates that such thinking has no worldly effect in that it lets Being be as sufficient unto itself, he nevertheless also holds out the possibility that this thinking, in so far as it overcomes metaphysics, 'might well help to bring about a change in human nature'.¹¹ This could occur, Heidegger continues, in the understanding granted to humanity by Being that each human being belongs essentially to the truth of Being. Only through the revelation of the truth of Being, to thinking the Nothing as its own essence, can humanity be saved from the danger arising in its persistent preoccupation with beings in the world.

Death and *Dasein*

Since the question of Being is posed by particular human entities, it will be necessary to elucidate, by way of preparation for the thinking of Being, how these entities are situated in terms of their particular being. What is to be noted firstly is that they are no longer viewed in terms of a reflective self-consciousness, as a subject that metaphysically and technologically constitutes the world according to its own desires. They are now interpreted as ontic entities which have been thrown into the world and whose being-there (*Dasein*) may be characterised as authentic or inauthentic depending on their relation to the question of Being. Authentic *Dasein*, through a penetrating mood of inward *angst*, finds itself enduring resolutely, 'ek-sisting ecstatically' as Heidegger puts it, in the presence of the truth of Being. Holding itself resolutely in the horizon of possibility, the opening proffered by Being, *Dasein* establishes itself as belonging

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism' *op. cit.*, p.299.

¹¹ M. Heidegger, 'The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics' [1949] tr. W. Kaufmann in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* *op. cit.*, vol.3, p.209.

properly, essentially, to itself, as that Being which 'is in each case mine'.¹² Inauthentic *Dasein*, in contrast, involves what Heidegger refers to as the 'they-self'. Absorbed in what is ready to hand in the world, 'when busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment', inauthentic *Dasein* remains fragmented in the being of others.¹³ *Dasein* may experience the truth of Being only through the isolated, monad-like unity of its particular standing in the 'clearing' of Being. Having relinquished the transcendental qualities of self-consciousness, the non-reflective principle of a self-possessing existence is now that through which the authentic human subject comes to be understood. This principle, as Adorno points out, nevertheless resembles the Hegelian notion of Being in so far as it stands independently outside the individual entity, *Dasein*, and yet constitutes its essence. Whereas Hegel acknowledged that existence in its nonidentity with conceptual thought can nevertheless only present itself conceptually, and proceeds on this basis to ontologize the ontical within the essentially determining unity of a transcendental reason, Heidegger avoids this concept centred, ontological procedure by insisting that existence is essential in itself. Ontic existence, *Dasein*, is now ontologized through the essentialising principle of individual self-appropriation; a principle, however, whose conceptual mediation of the ontic, Heidegger obscures in the appealing claim to an uncorrupted unity of existence belonging to itself. Existence is thereby 'awarded the dignity of the Platonic idea, but also the bulletproof character of something that cannot otherwise be conceived because it is no conception, because it is simply there'.¹⁴ The Hegelian dialectical mediation of universal and particular is reformulated as an undialectical relation of self-belonging. This self-belonging assumes the same positional value, however, as that of a philosophical *a priori* category. *Dasein* not only takes on the status of factual, ontic immediacy evident in positivist epistemology, its concern with the question of Being intimates also a more than factual, indeed transcendental perspective reminiscent of idealism. Following Hegel's failed promise of social reconciliation, Heidegger's turn to a purely inner, spiritual reconciliation, Adorno argues, appears as the sign of individuality on the point of social extinction.

The Hegelian experience of consciousness, where subject and object become identical in the mediating ground of conceptual reflection, is reduced to the

¹² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927] tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, and London, Harper and Row, 1962. p.67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.68.

undifferentiated relation of mineness and authenticity, to the identity of the self with itself on the basis of a phenomenological difference which suddenly evaporates once Being is mine. The hollow identity of *Dasein* with its own Being, abstract selfness, is substituted for subjective reflection. Authenticity becomes an immediate quality situated directly in *Dasein* rather than a quality judged through any mediating idea of authenticity. In the absence of such mediation authenticity is merely an arbitrary designation that can be brought to bear on any content when required. In this way *Dasein* has complete control over its decisions and actions without being subjected to either conceptual or social determinations other than the necessity of attending to its own self-preservation, and what amounts to a compliance with those commands emanating from whatever political grouping happens then to be empowered. Through the ontologization of *Dasein*'s self-appropriation any social or historical understanding of the emergence of such freedom becomes dispensable.

The societal relation, which seals itself off in the identity of the subject, is desocietalised into an in-itself. The individual, who himself can no longer rely on any firm possession, holds on to himself in his extreme abstractness as the last, the supposedly unlosable possession.¹⁵

Having turned its back on social relations, self-possessing *Dasein*, a self without objective determinations, hypostatizes this abstract freedom in a dutiful reverence for Being; a Being, however, which, while *Dasein*'s own, also controls the possibility of *Dasein*'s authentic experience of itself. In effect *Dasein*'s control over itself is indistinguishable from the controls exercised by Being.

Heidegger transforms *Dasein* into a non-sensuous, psychically vacant inwardness whose only feature is a last ditch consolation for those individuals become conscious of their social impotence. Acquiescing in the abstract individuality occasioned by social history, Heidegger's poetically couched consolation is at once ideological support for an economic exchange principle that renders *Dasein* entirely subservient to its social machinations. Similarly to that metaphysics supposedly overcome, the non-relational emptiness, the in-itself existence now attributed to a subject stripped of all sensuous and reflective capacities, is raised to a transcendental status from which all authority is said to derive. As with metaphysical realism, the transcendental authority granted to existence

¹⁴ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.122.

reveals complicity with the status quo whatever the latter's political and social manifestation. Moreover, *Dasein* is so much more subjected to that world the more it claims to stand above it; and this, through the psychological rigidity of an orchestrated good cheer, the 'inauthentic' conformity exacted of it by a social reality demanding the ideological positivity of abstract self-identities.

Moreover what characterises authenticity most essentially in *Dasein*'s belonging with Being is its being-for-death. Just as authentic *Dasein* does not reflect on its relation to the inauthentic 'they', so too it does not engage in any predicative thoughts regarding death, and so Heidegger maintains faith with his ontology of existence. 'Being-towards-death', as Heidegger calls it, is to be understood merely as a possibility to be cultivated, which Being reveals only rarely.¹⁶ The cultivation of death signifies, for Heidegger, the allowing of the possibility of death to pervade our being. Authentic *Dasein* endures the possibility of death as an expectant *angst*, and, as Adorno puts it, with 'a gesture of internal silence'.¹⁷ The dignity accorded death, its imperial ontological authority, admits of no refusal. Unlike the Kantian imperative, constructed according to laws of moral reason, the Heideggerian imperative is carried through under the indisputable rule of existence. The necessary sacrifice of life is nothing short of an actualisation of freedom, a freedom bestowed on it by Being. Such, Adorno argues, is the ideological preparation, the sanctifying justification for the sacrificial rituals carried through in Nazi Germany against both the Jews and the German populace. The inevitability of death has been recast as a command to be obeyed. When nothing may be predicated of existence, when the possibility of death is transformed into an imperative simply because it is, then language has reduced thinking to a tautological 'recitation of words' in which thinking perishes. Referring particularly to the term 'authenticity', although it may be said of Heidegger's essentialising terms generally, Adorno argues that -

The pure tautology, which propagates the concept while at the same time refusing to define that concept - and which mechanically repeats the concept - is intelligence in the form of violence. Violence inheres in the nucleus of Heidegger's philosophy, as it does in the form of his language. That violence lies in the constellation into which his philosophy moves self-preservation and death. The self-preserving principle threatens its subjects with death, as an

¹⁵ T.W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* [1964] tr. K. Tarnowski and F. Will, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p.115.

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* op. cit., pp.305-306.

¹⁷ T.W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, op. cit., p.131.

ultima ratio, a final reason; and when this death is used as the very essence of that principle it means the theodicy of death.¹⁸

The subject of Heidegger's metaphysics of death has been honed down to a barely ontic, isolated self devoid of empirical and conceptual adornments, where self-preservation is indistinguishable from Being being one's own, from the self's horizon of death. With a self so depleted of everything except its bare mortality, it is absurd, Adorno claims, to attribute authenticity to it. Indeed Heidegger's identity of self and self-preservation in the name of death is not far from Spinoza's pantheism, despite the latter's articulation through the **idea** of existence. However, the idea of self, which Kant later develops through transcendental self-reflection, implicates a certain conceptual relation to, and thereby mediation of, the nonidentical activity of self-preservation. Reducing this relation to a tautological nonsense where the self preserves itself by virtue of its anticipated death, Heidegger restamps ontology with the sign of identity. Despite his claim that the truth of existence may be found in the as yet unthought ontological difference of self and self-preservation, of subject and object, both collapse in on one another revealing nothing but the pure assertion of existence.

The primordial meaning of *Dasein*, through which an opening may be formed toward the thinking of Being, depends not just on *Dasein*'s authenticity but also, Heidegger maintains, on its 'potentiality-for-Being-a-whole'. This potential Being-whole of *Dasein* is explicated through the consoling pathos of 'care'; a self-preserving care accomplished transcendently through the temporal horizon of future time. Heidegger immediately disqualifies the more accepted, ontic understanding of *Dasein*'s wholeness through a temporally cumulative series of significant experiences in the world. Here the subject is interpreted as a being held within the past, whose unity derives principally from the past. Heidegger is more concerned with disclosing the origin of this temporality in a more essential recollection, which comes to light through *Dasein*'s structural totality as 'care'. 'Care' recollects not the past but more essentially the forgotten nothingness into which all existence passes. 'Care' recollects the future as death. Heidegger states -

*Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially **futural** so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factual 'there' by shattering itself against death - that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equi-primordially in the process of **having-been**, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.133-134. {Adorno's italics}

*inherited, take over its own thrownness and be in the moment of vision for 'its time'. Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate - that is to say, authentic historicality.*¹⁹

'Care' is nothing short of an ontological vigilance, a looking forward over our own finitude; and yet such finitude would seem to indicate the impossibility of *Dasein* becoming a whole-Being. The limitation of finitude would appear to obstruct the potential unity of *Dasein*. Once the social and personally reflected experiences of the metaphysical subject have been laid aside, however, there is nothing left, Adorno argues, but to disclose wholeness as the ontological limit of *Dasein*'s self-preservation. Indeed Heidegger asserts -

As long as *Dasein* is an entity, it has never reached its 'wholeness'. But if it gains such 'wholeness', this gain becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the-world. In such a case, it can never again be experienced as an entity.²⁰

Only in death can *Dasein* achieve that wholeness which gives meaning to its previously 'caring' existence. In line with Scheler's phenomenological adoption of the pre-reflected notion of 'wholeness' from *Gestalt* psychology, Heidegger now innovatively defends the unmediated and thereby unquestionable fore-understanding of 'wholeness' as death. Death is that 'authentic historicality', that temporal 'fate' which as *Dasein*'s whole-Being is awarded the highest transcendental honour. Death is Being, where authentic *Dasein* acquires meaning through Being's deathly appropriation of human existence. 'Wholeness', however, is more precisely a piece of apologetic subterfuge, Adorno maintains, for a life otherwise fragmented by the vicissitudes of the contemporary social context. Moreover the meaninglessness for which Heidegger castigates Western metaphysics reappears in the death-defying spectacle of death's own negative absoluteness.

Tautology and nihilism bind themselves into a holy alliance. ... Hegel's metaphysics, which cannot be brought back again, and which had its positive absolute in the totality of negations, is here interiorized to a dimensionless point. In such a construction it is reduced to the Hegelian 'fury of disappearance', to the unmediated theodicy of annihilation.²¹

¹⁹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., p.437. {Heidegger's italics and bold type}

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.280. {Heidegger's italics}

²¹ T.W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, op. cit., p.139.

Hegel had already been critical of the self-sufficiency of Fichte's absolute ego whose abstract self-assertions merely assured the hastening of its self-destructive fate. Heidegger's ontology of death, in which *Dasein* cares for its self-preservation through the horizon of death's inevitability, now appears, Adorno intimates, as an already 'beheaded' self-positing.²²

The attempt to retreat from the world into an inner-worldly realm of self-belonging is a poor response, Adorno maintains, to an irreconcilable split between the individual and society evident since Hegel. While siphoning off Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness' and any sense of self-reflection from *Dasein*, while sanctifying the bare existence of 'man' as the monadic authority in any claim to truth, Heidegger, contrary to his own intention, merely succeeds in reifying what remains of the isolated social subject. 'Man', as Heidegger's language so often conveys, conjures up a sense of wonder in the unmediated simplicity of 'man's' being-there. 'Here', Adorno notes, 'all the concretion of authenticity has its mystery: the concreteness of whatever is as its own image'.²³ Accompanying this self delight at being in the world is 'man's' humility - an unquestioned giving thanks to Being for granting the possibility of existence and that solitude, so much a part of German agrarian culture, to which Heidegger so romantically attaches himself. Here, clinging to *Dasein*, are the thinly veiled signs of a self-conscious subject. This subject, however, no longer knows itself through the heroising lens of the early nineteenth century, but now, in the twentieth, knows itself as a powerless and insignificant piece of existence whose only hope, which is no hope at all, is to mythologise or revere its own nothingness. The inner isolation of *Dasein's* existence, from this perspective, resembles what Adorno calls 'a supernatural nature-category'.²⁴ Furthermore there is with Heidegger, as with Spinoza and Hegel also, a certain testimonial tribute to the absolute lawlessness of nature's cycle of regeneration and decay. While traditional theology had offered hope in a heavenly, eternal life after that on earth, Heidegger's minimalist refashioning leads rather to a pious acceptance of human suffering and sacrifice. Seen in this light, Heidegger's philosophy is nothing short of a training ground for submission to whatever administrative directives may be issued by a social system in the unrelenting technological grip of its own economic and political

²² *Ibid.*, p.116

²³ *Ibid.*, p.64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.65.

growth. Such authority, Adorno continues, has no legitimate basis other than its present existence. The totalitarian form of contemporary economic and political power relations can be read in what Adorno calls 'the universally human language-gesture' so often apparent in Heidegger's use of the term 'man'.²⁵ This jargon of authenticity, as Adorno portrays it, this universal language-gesture which refers to everyone and nobody in particular, disguises the totalitarian structure of power through what is at best a caricature of democratic equality in the universal linguistic compliance exacted of all individuals.

Such universal humanity ... is ideology. It caricatures the equal rights of everything which bears a human face, since it hides from men the unalleviated discriminations of societal power : the differences between hunger and over-abundance, between spirit and docile idiocy.²⁶

Heidegger's self-righteous talk of 'authenticity' and 'wholeness' serves equally to conceal the inner functional division of labour, the psychological fragmentation of the modern subject made evident by psychoanalysis. The latter gave the lie to that abstract unity of body and soul, of being a whole or complete person, mystically propounded by *Gestalt* psychology, and incorporated unquestioningly into Heidegger's understanding of authenticity. Authentic *Dasein*, complete only in its being-for-death, creates the transcendental justification for dismissing any critical need to question not only individuals' psychological make-ups but the specific social conditions through which these have been shaped.

Being and Ontology

In order to elucidate Heidegger's notion of Being it will be useful to refer briefly to Husserl's understanding of categorial vision, and which Adorno later refers to as essence perception. Categorial vision signals for Husserl a sense of perceiving truth no longer through the transcendental deduction of a self-conscious subject, but as the immediate intellectual vision of an already given, objectively sufficient *ratio*. Furthermore, the revelatory power of categorial vision does not concern the spatio-temporal existence of phenomena but rather the truth and meaning of propositional utterances. In his explication of categorial vision Husserl nevertheless draws an analogy between this purely intellectual perception of propositional truth and the intuitive

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.66.

²⁶ *Ibid*

perception of objects in the world. Husserl thereby indicates that the intuitive force of categorial vision still occurs within the dimension of pure subjectivity. Following Brentano, Husserl identifies this pure subjective dimension as one of intention. Intention, however, is not understood as self-conscious will, but refers to the manner in which the particular words of a proposition produce meaning. Husserl differentiates between those words of a sentence which refer to lived experience and those like 'and', 'or', 'if', 'only' etc., which indicate a certain relational analytic. The fulfilment of intention, of meaning, is nothing but the unity of both these aspects within a sentence. In other words, categorial intuition transcends the subject through which it passes, for the meaning of propositional utterances remains untainted by any subjective will. The propositional truths uncovered through categorial intuition are thus regarded somewhat paradoxically, Adorno points out, as something like empirical facts while being understood equally as rational facts not unlike the laws governing mathematical relations.²⁷ What drives this ambiguity is the indeterminate merging of intuition and judgement; a categorial vision which 'confuses that second immediacy with a first immediacy'.²⁸ As Adorno again points out -

There is no second act of becoming aware of what one has judged in addition to the actual judging itself, unless of course one reflects on the judgement. Such a reflection, however, would necessarily transcend the 'immediacy' of the actual act of judgement which for itself would become the *object* of such a reflection.²⁹

In effect a judgement cannot fulfill the criterion of immediacy attributed to categorial vision without remaining potentially dogmatic. Yet Husserl, like Heidegger after him, was driven by an ontological need to recover the cogency of a categorial essence in the immediacy of its own self-presentation.

Being, with Heidegger, stands sufficiently unto itself without apparent trace of the concrete forming relation between concept and entity, subject and object. Despite Kant's critique of earlier rationalist ontologies, notably those of Descartes and Spinoza, with their respective notions of a thinking subject without sensuous experience and a transcendental Being thinking its own existence,³⁰ both positions are resurrected in unison by Heidegger under the shining glare of an unquestioned immediacy. Heidegger's

²⁷ T.W. Adorno, 'Husserl and the Problem of Idealism' in *The Journal of Philosophy* vol.xxxvii, 1940. p.13.

²⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p.81.

²⁹ T.W. Adorno, 'Husserl and the Problem of Idealism' *op. cit.*, pp.15-16. {Adorno's italics}

³⁰ As Adorno indicates, (*Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.65) these critiques are to be found respectively in the chapters on 'The Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection' and 'The Paralogisms of Pure Reason' in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* tr. N. Kemp Smith, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1978.

categorial vision of Being also ignores the Hegelian demonstration that any sense of immediacy is but a moment of knowledge, at once mediated by the synthetic judgement which announces it. Without the conceptual moment of reflection all claims to factual immediacy will remain without meaning, and can maintain themselves as something more than fictitious only through that mythical aura created for them by the sanctimonious, positive tones of ontological reverence. Adorno constructs a more immanent critique by exposing the double-edged advantage Heidegger derives from the word 'is'. For Being not only acquires a sense of ontic existence through the predication generally accompanying the copula, but when the copula stands alone it acts as an already accomplished synthetic judgement, an ontological postulate which transcends the ontic. Unwilling to relinquish either the sense of concrete existence or ontological gravity apparent in the term 'Being', Heidegger similarly exploits the still indeterminate distinction evident in Presocratic philosophy between the terms for immediacy and essential presence, (τοδε τι and ουσια), raising this indetermination to a position of supreme phenomenological value. In this way the ontic and ontological are able to take the place of the other without any remainder whenever the need arises.

Mere entity becomes nonentity; rid of the stain of being an entity, it is raised up to Being, to its own pure concept. Being, on the other hand, devoid of any content that would restrict it, no longer needs to appear as a concept. It is held to be immediate like τοδε τι, in other words to be concrete. Once isolated absolutely, the two moments have no *differentia specifica* from each other and become interchangeable. This *quid pro quo* is a main feature of Heidegger's philosophy.³¹

Heidegger thus covertly repeats the Hegelian dialectic of Being and Nothing, where each passes silently and unobtrusively into the other just on account of their pure indeterminacy. Yet the distinction between concept and thing, which Heidegger claims to dissolve in the concrete immediacy of Being, surreptitiously lives on in the very postulation of Being's transcendental quality. For that entity which acquires the transcendental status of Being does so only through the undisclosed synthetic judgement of a subject otherwise claiming to have submitted itself to a Being beyond its conceptual grasp.

From the mind which synthesizes it, entity borrows the aura of being more than factual : the sanctity of transcendence. And this

³¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.75 note. {Adorno's italics}

very structure hypostatizes itself as superior to the reflective intellect, which is accused of dissecting entity and concept with a scalpel.³²

In effect Heidegger's immediate perception of Being cannot do without that spontaneity of thought otherwise spurned in the turn away from idealism. Hence, Adorno argues -

[Heidegger's] outbreak is an outbreak into the mirror. Blinded to the moment of synthesis in the substrate, he ignores the fact that the mind - which in Heidegger's adored Eleatic philosophy of Being confessed to identity with Being - is already implied in the meaning of what it presents as the pure self-hood it would be confronting.³³

Indeed the profundity of Being is judged according to a judgement which denies that judgement's very presence. Abstraction is raised to the highest level of concretion and truth. Just as science, and positivism generally, are intent on eliminating the subjective variable with its conceptual presuppositions from their methodological analyses of natural and social objects, so like Heidegger's ontology, the more stringently they achieve this goal the more they revert to 'pure thought' and an undisclosed thinking subject. Moreover, with similar irony, the ontological thought structures that arise under the guise of essence perception are no different in their primacy from those that Heidegger sought to dispel. Both Heidegger and Husserl fail to understand that concepts are not simply a direct register of mental facts which may, on this account, be then reduced to a phenomenological condition no different from the very in-itself existence of sensory objects. Here, despite Heidegger's anti-scientific pathos, the positivist affinity between science and ontology becomes most evident. Unable to recognise the socio-historic relations embedded in these concepts, Heidegger proceeds to hypostatise their phenomenological factuality. He thereby transforms them into a second immediacy, into things devoid, however, of sensuous content. In other words when this second immediacy becomes indistinguishable from the initial immediacy of perceived objects, what results, Adorno notes, is the reification of consciousness. The ontological need to sustain the immediate wholeness of Being against an alienating metaphysics, which categorically divides thought and entity, merely reproduces, however, the subject's continuing inability to reflect on these otherwise unmediated, potentially dogmatic domains of exclusion. Heidegger effectively leaves that relation submerged under the murky immediacy of Being's nonconceptual nothingness. In effect the emptiness of the word 'Being' signals a

³² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

poverty of thought unable to extricate itself from a no man's land that it blindly reinforces.

Adorno's conception of negative dialectics neither abandons the moment of intuitive or receptive immediacy nor its phenomenological manifestation as essence perception. Essence perception, Adorno points out, derives originally from Hegel's insight concerning the objective presence of the universal in the particular. Contrary to both Husserl and Heidegger, however, Adorno does not amputate the critical potential of reflective thought. He does not reduce conceptual thinking to a passive description of meaning, or conjure it away in the unmediated identity of thought and Being, and so hypostatise such perception in the immediacy of pre-given rational structures or the language of pure existence. Whereas essence perception with Husserl and Heidegger involves the disclosure of a self-evident and so unquestionable meaning in the singular intention of mental facts, Adorno considers essence perception rather in terms of a 'physiognomic view of mental facts'.³⁴ Here objective meaning, truth, surfaces in the mediation of those facts within a constellation of ideas; a constellation moreover, which while the product of social relations, is neither absolute nor beyond further critical reflection. When essence perception becomes frozen in scientific classifications or the indubitable immediacy of some nonconceptual notion of existence, it eliminates any critical perspective regarding the particular social and psychological conditions through which life is experienced in the present historical context.

As the experience of what has come into being in things which supposedly merely are, essence perception would be the almost diametrical opposite of the end it is used for. Rather than a faithful acceptance of Being, it would be its critique; rather than a sense of the thing's identity with its concept, it would be an awareness of the break between them.³⁵

The indiscriminate merger of particular and universal, of entity and concept, of mental fact and categorial vision, has its social correlation in the increasingly tight-knit control now exercised by institutions of social administration over individual lives. Essence perception thus appears to directly fulfill the empirical conditions of proof without which its scientific or ontological status could not be sustained. The immersion in mental facts

³³ *Ibid.*, p.84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.82-83.

or *Dasein*, through which such perception arises, reveals nothing but a transcendental repetition of the latter's immediacy.

By virtue of the logic of the philosophical aporia ... Heidegger transposes the empirical superiority of the way things are into the realm of essence.³⁶

Claiming to avoid the charge of unsubstantiated generalisation, both Heidegger and Husserl remain nevertheless unable to penetrate those mental facts and reveal their inner socio-historic determinants.

While Heidegger claims for Being a more authentic, and so superior status over the laws of rational reason, its original topology lies not so much in some unthought ontological difference between subject and object, but in the unresolved aporiae of rational thought. Heidegger nevertheless adorns this unresolvability with the highest ontological honours. A central feature of this technique, already evident in the relations of concept, entity, and categorial vision, is again apparent in Heidegger's understanding of the relations between subject, predicate, and copula. With Adorno the subject/predicate relation is independent neither of the copula, nor of an intentional meaning, however obscurely communicated, on the part of a conceiving subject. Heidegger, however, construes the subject/predicate relation as an ontological state of difference beyond any intended meaning. Furthermore he attributes to the copula a quality of being in-itself outside this relation, and as that upon which this relation essentially depends. What here signifies an irreducible difference between subject and predicate also acquires the positive significance of ontological priority. In other words the copula now assumes a supreme value in what Heidegger understands as the ontological difference between subject and predicate. Adorno considers this claim on the part of Heidegger as highly paralogical.

The paralogism lies in the transformation of that negative - that one of the moments cannot be reduced to the other - into something positive.³⁷

Having attributed to the irreducibility of subject and predicate the status of an ontological difference, Heidegger thereby smothers their dialectical entwinement. Since the copula is neither fully subject nor predicate, since it is neatly neither concept nor entity, this does not provide sufficient reason, Adorno argues, to hypostatise it as a transcendental

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.100.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104.

absolute beyond such relations. Indeed without a dialectical appreciation of their mutually dependent relationship, the irreducibility of both aspects to the other retains no significance.

Just as Heidegger conflates the irreducible difference of subject and predicate with the empty positivity of the copula, so too he conflates ontic existence with the ontological in the notion of pure Being. Having dissolved any conceptual understanding of the relation between Being and entity, their so-called ontological difference remains indissolubly wedded to tautology. Indeed the irreducible ontological difference of Being and entity, which Heidegger seeks to explicate, is more properly a disguise for their unmitigated identity. While entity is not possible without Being, the latter supposedly exists independently, until entity is presented as an already ontologized condition by virtue of its sheer, unmediated existence. Adorno draws attention in this regard to Heidegger's formulaic statement in *Being and Time* that '[t]he essence of Dasein lies in its existence'.³⁸ Heidegger has not changed this position in his later *Letter on Humanism* where he states -

The phrase, 'man exists', does not answer the question of whether there are actually men or not; it answers the question of the 'essence' of man.³⁹

The difference between essence and existence is effectively cancelled. For, as Adorno indicates --

precisely what is not essential in Dasein, precisely what is not ontological in it, *is* ontological. The ontological difference is removed by means of a conceptualization of the nonconceptual into nonconceptuality.⁴⁰

The sense of all this, Adorno contends, is an indirect admission that Being equally cannot do without entity - that ontology cannot do without the ontic. In order to avoid the contradictory and so scandalous implications of ontic mediation in the ontological, the ontic is at once ontologized, thereby revealing the declared primacy of their indeterminate ontological difference as more primarily an undisclosed identity. The conceptual expression of ontological difference in the word 'Being' effectively denies ontic difference, thereby rendering it susceptible to Adorno's charge that 'the concept is exalted by the nonconceptuality said to be beneath it'.⁴¹

³⁸ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit., p.67.

³⁹ M. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', op. cit., p.279.

⁴⁰ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p.117. {Adorno's italics}

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Heidegger seeks to dispel the technological myth of metaphysics, only to reinstate its originating, archaic features in an ontological identity reminiscent of the indeterminate Presocratic difference between thought and entity. Postulated outside that difference, and yet unifying the differential qualities of both, Being as essence is later with Plato and Aristotle identified more clearly as belonging within one aspect of this difference, that of the conceptual *ratio*. Being becomes concept - essence becomes idea. In order to redeem Being as essentially pure existence, Heidegger portrays the history of Being since Plato as a history leading to human destitution; and this since Being becomes mistakenly tied, in Heidegger's view, to the scientific instrumental will of self-conscious reason. In relegating the mythological qualities of scientific metaphysics to a position of historical desuetude, Heidegger, somewhat unconscionably, resurrects the mythical aura of Presocratic Being. This is especially noticeable in the identity of Being with the indeterminate mythical qualities of fate. The identity of essence as existence here drops the illusory facade of transcendence and shows Being precisely as 'the blind context of nature; the doom of concatenation; the absolute negation of the transcendence whose tremolo notes quiver in the talk of Being'.⁴² Still evident in Heidegger's recall to fate, a cyclical rendition of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, is the illusion of transcendence, which persists in the translation of human history and suffering into ontological moments of Being. Cut off from the memory of human misery, that history is sanctified as a natural condition.

Symbolically represented by Heidegger as individual *angst*, this natural context takes on a transcendent sheen through its eternal, fateful recurrence. *Angst*, as the authentic way of being-towards-death, becomes a telltale sign of Being's proximity. The absurdities of fate and human suffering are feted thus as the *a priori* constituents of ontological meaning. The specific historicity of human life is melted down into a doctrine of invariants where the power of Being, with its fateful repetitions, is a euphemism for those historical forces to which the individual must irrevocably submit. History is here reduced to a pure state of nature which Heidegger then copies onto the ontological or credit side of the ledger. An essential constituent of this reduction is Heidegger's dissolution not only of the difference between Being and existence, the ontic and the ontological, but also the difference between time and eternity. Transiency, the

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.119.

repetitious flux of decay and regeneration, is given absolute value as the eternal sameness of Being. Heidegger stamps Being with a temporality whose essential possibility, to be and become Nothing, is always unchanged. *Dasein*'s infinite possibility, its historicity, is but a way of being-toward-death. Being is nothing but an ontological mantra, which dismisses all historical contingencies in the invariance of lived possibilities.

[H]istoricity immobilizes history in the unhistorical realm, heedless of the historical conditions that govern the inner composition and constellation of subject and object.⁴³

Critical of the subjective relativism infecting the social sciences in their interpretation of particular psychological and social objects, Heidegger's cult of Being remains no less subjective in its ontological claim to the unmediated self-evidence of existence. Equally Heidegger's critique of metaphysics' glorification of the historical past, and his turn to an essentially futural perspective as the authentic path to Being, remains afflicted with a mythologized abstraction of historical becoming no less delusive than the former's teleological notion of progress. Heidegger's ontological integration of history within a phenomenologically naturalised Being, or what constitutes the indeterminate identity of history and Being, means that history may just as much appear the work of Being as that of actual historical forces. In view of this ambivalence Adorno notes Löwith's perspective on the political implications of Heidegger's ontology.

That history can be ignored or deified, depending on the circumstances, is a practicable political conclusion from the philosophy of Being.⁴⁴

One way or the other, any critical consideration of actual social history is shunted aside by the very word said to express its ontological essence. In the mystical anticipation of Being, a Being that is one's own, individuals are effectively turned away from such questions. Their lives, their existences, become solidly integrated within already current social practices. Unreflective imitation of what exists is seen to be the highest good on the path to Being. Heidegger's ontological sanctification of how things are, devoid of any idea of justice, 'remains ... the naked affirmation of what is anyway - the affirmation of power'.⁴⁵

The need for ontological substance, which Heidegger's philosophy satisfies, is at once a protest against the spiritual reification of humanity suffered under a long standing,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

conceptually, and thereby technologically, driven metaphysics. Unfortunately, as Adorno indicates, what Heidegger achieves is nothing but the appeal to a solidity and wholeness of which no individual may be deprived. As indicated previously, this is but an indirect apology for the way things are. In dismissing social conditions as not worthy of critical investigation, as unessential entities, Heidegger's ontological attempt to overcome reification merely reinforces the ideological disguise of individual freedom, which masks the alienating sense of impotence imposed by those conditions. With Heidegger both the thinking subject and the social object are reduced to immediate pre-reflective states of pure existence. Both are reified respectively as pure abstraction and pure matter. Any dynamic relation between them, which modern philosophy since Descartes has in varying degrees sought to explicate, is obliterated.⁴⁶ In the nonreflective, nonsensuous context of Heidegger's philosophy, Adorno argues 'Life becomes polarized, wholly abstract and wholly concrete, although it would be only in the tension between them'.⁴⁷ Critical of the unresolved dualisms of earlier philosophy, Heidegger claims to have reconciled both moments in the unveiling of their original difference; an 'irretrievable origin', as Adorno puts it, whose mythical, impenetrable form nevertheless undermines any sense of reconciliation. For the ontological need, while pandering to the apparent meaninglessness of modern life, is nothing but a hopeful plea to be rid once and for all of the vicissitudes of self-reflection and any relation to the sensuous world. The question of Being, to which there is no solution except death, is the sign of a consciousness engulfed by the social reification it otherwise seeks to dethrone. The ontological need invites hope in a transcendental escape from those emotional and material needs that remain presently unfulfilled. Adorno argues that 'inverted needs of that sort also spiritualize our unconscious suffering under the material denial'.⁴⁸ Heidegger's ontology, with its delusory appeal to pure existence, thus becomes an ideological substitute for those social and material needs that remain unsatisfied. The consolation offered by Heidegger's ontologically dehistoricised categories is no different in effect from the empty promises of freedom ideologically promulgated by the culture industry generally. Being is the sign of individuality desperate to preserve its identity, even in death, in the face of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.131

⁴⁶ Cf. Herbert Marcuse's 1936 article 'The Concept of Essence' in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, tr. J. Shapiro, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969.

⁴⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p.91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.93.

psychological and social disintegration. It is equally the sign of a failed emancipation where the subject takes on the debilitating character of being solely for another, of being merely a dispensable piece of merchandise under the governing institutions' guidelines for economic productivity.

Language and Religious Belief

The ontological dignity with which Heidegger endows the term 'Being', the sacred aura that emanates from words like 'existence', 'authenticity', 'death', arises through an appeal to their self-sufficient semantic isolation. Heidegger's quest for essential meaning does not pass through an understanding of the relations of words to each other within a particular configuration, but relies altogether on the perception of that meaning through a categorial vision pertaining to each word. In their monadic rigidity these words seemingly acquire the weight of concrete existence; an existence bathed at the same time, however, in the ceremonial salts of transcendental revelation. When imbued with this ontological aura as the sole authority for meaning, the words so favoured become, in Adorno's view, nothing short of jargon. That more essential meaning, that truth which extends beyond these words' empirical significance, is frozen in the relationless and so contentless abstraction of their simple expression. Here the differences between truth and thinking, word and thing, and words themselves in their syntactic relations are passed over in favour of a meaning which, through philological excavations, surfaces in the form of an archaic deposit. What is at work on this archaeological site, Adorno notes, is an exaggerated reverence for language where archaic origins become the sole foundation of meaning. In the search for these origins Heidegger trades on the ambivalence between being and thought evident in Presocratic philosophy, and constructs on the foundation of this indeterminate and so contentless difference a secularised religion of Being. Unlike its Christian counterpart, however, Heidegger's cult of Being now offers salvation in the very meaninglessness of death's eternity. The promise of infinite Nothingness is experienced within the finite condition of authentic *Dasein* as an indeterminate *angst*, as a poetic reverie in the meaningless meaning of pure language. A belief, however, in the absolute nothingness of Being, in pure language, indicates a religion without content. What this implies, Adorno points out,

is that '[o]ne needs only to be a believer - no matter what he believes in'.⁴⁹ In view of the Christian religion historically losing its universal hold, Heidegger's ontology, Adorno contends, gives succour to the still persistent social need for some form of religious belief no matter what its content. A conceptually unmediated belief in some transcendental category or value, a belief where the archaically invested expression of particular words stands as the sufficient arbiter of faith, now acts as the irrational glue binding an otherwise fraying social fabric.

In the claim to communicate a sacred, archaic meaning in the everyday use of words, Heidegger's language appears untouched by the manipulating forms of mass communication - bourgeois individuality seems alive and well. Yet when this language is expressed through the condition of bare human existence, unmediated by conceptual self-reflection, it becomes a prime ideological tool for universal social administration. Moreover, the jargon's ritualised ecclesiastic tones, along with its nostalgia for the simple agrarian life, makes it easily acceptable to a society craving a strong dose of collective narcissism. Making promises for the future while defending the present social state of affairs, posing the question of hope whose fulfilment depends on its unanswerability and unattainability, this is the ambivalence which makes Heidegger's jargon suitable for appropriation across all forms of social discourse 'reaching from sermon to advertisement'.⁵⁰ Here the archaic aura, which lights up the everyday use of language as something rare in its forgotten simplicity, has its most telling counter effect. Despite their archaic inoculation against mass consumption, in their discrete simplicity words become interchangeable signs, which can be used for any number of desired effects.

They are useful for arbitrary effect-connotations, without regard to the pathos of uniqueness which they usurp, and which has its origin on the market, on the market for which what is rare has exchange value.⁵¹

The homey familiarity of a language, which passes as rare in its archaic simplicity, may be uniformly broadcast through the mass media into the homes of millions. With Hitler's Aryan rantings on blood and soil the chatter of the inauthentic historically engulfs Heidegger's linguistic shrine to essential meaning, which was otherwise dependent on the former's continued expulsion. Despite its anti-functional intent, Heidegger's ontological

⁴⁹ T.W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, op. cit., p.21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

personalism, when transferred to the political arena of National Socialism, serves to paralyse social consciousness through its standardised authenticity; a jargon whose directional imperatives closely resemble what Kafka felt under the arbitrary commands of a political authority dedicated to its own self-preservation.⁵² Just as political power now remains more conveniently concealed behind the seductive allure of modern advertising, so too a language couched in the personalised terms of individual welfare and safety veils the impersonal administrative and legal powers of contemporary bureaucracies.

The reciprocity of the personal and apersonal in the jargon; the apparent humanization of the thingly; the actual turning of man into thing: all this is the luminous copy of that administrative situation in which both abstract justice and objective procedural orders appear under the guise of face-to-face decisions.⁵³

Except for a bureaucratically or ontologically formalised structure of what it is to be a person, the particular circumstances of individual need are effectively ignored. Indifferent equally to the content of language, the bureaucratic and ontological jargon of authenticity is nothing but the assertion of pure meaning.

The dignity, the authenticity, with which Heidegger clothes this meaning, whose only content is an unknowable ontological difference between thought and being, conceals a denial of freedom in an autonomous aesthetics of death. While, for Kant, dignity had been closely intertwined with an individual subject's capacity to contribute rationally to the formation of a specifically social freedom, with Heidegger, dignity is achieved in *Dasein*'s unplanned but ecstatic self-sacrifice to the meaningless void of Being, or what translates phenomenologically as death. Dignity is realised only in an uncalculating attentiveness to the possibility of death; and death preserves what is more properly, Heidegger states, the dignity of Being. This quasi-religious belief in the essential nothingness of Being thereby culminates in what Adorno describes as an 'enthusiasm for irrational sacrifice'.⁵⁴ Heidegger repeats the irrational Christian response to death as a sign of God's grace and will. This can be seen, in Adorno's view, as 'a reactionary response toward the secularisation of death'.⁵⁵ The ontological dignity of Heidegger's language revives a transcendental meaning in death; a meaning, however,

⁵² F. Kafka, *The Trial* [1925] Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972.

⁵³ T.W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* op. cit., p.83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.161.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.163.

whose positive appearance in language is nothing but an empty consolation, an abstract negation of death's negativity. Here the poverty of *Dasein's* attempt to assert transcendental meaning in the face of fear and social violence becomes most evident. *Dasein's* dignified facade, attained in the fragile security of inner self-control, distinguishes itself as human no longer through critical reflection, but through what Adorno calls a 'suppressed animality',⁵⁶ through its own sheer existence governed absolutely by an indiscriminate, arbitrary fate.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.165.