ADORNO AND THE MODERN

ETHOS OF FREEDOM

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DECLARATION

I hereby attest that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I further attest that all sources have been acknowledged.

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NOTES

i) In the footnotes and bibliography I have tried as far as possible to give the original date of publication in brackets if this differs from the edition being cited.

ii) On occasion a footnote will appear on the page following its location in the text. The word processing software appears to be the reason for this anomaly.
Adorno's relation to the modern ethos of freedom is developed through an immanent critique of six other modern philosophies of freedom. In the first instance I examine Adorno's response to the logics of freedom enunciated by Kant and Hegel. Both make claim to the actuality of freedom by way of a self-reflexive conceptual ratio. In a second phase, I turn to Adorno's critique of those different aesthetics of existence presented by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Here the conditions of possibility for freedom are articulated through an existential poiesis of the will and language respectively. The philosophical opposition of conceptual ratio and existential poiesis as forms of practical reason is carried through in the more contemporary, antithetical politics of truth given voice by Habermas and Foucault. Since Adorno's discussion of these philosophers is virtually non-existent, with the aid of other commentators, I develop an immanent critique of their positions on my own behalf. Despite claiming to resolve the earlier aporias of practical reason through communicative and aesthetic practices respectively, Habermas and Foucault, I contend, simply reproduce them. Unlike his modern counterparts, Adorno does not attempt to resolve the aporia of freedom and unfreedom, but articulates their relation as an antagonistic unity, or what amounts to a negative dialectics of freedom. In so doing, Adorno firstly rescues sensuous spontaneity and nonidentity from within the all too reductive charter of the conceptual ratio. Secondly, he redeems a critical metaphysics or utopian perspective from within the existential immanence of an eternally recurrent poiesis. In effect the modern cultural opposition of conceptual ratio and existential poiesis may be viewed as 'torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. While removed from its original social context, this irresolvable arithmetic metaphor serves equally well to encapsulate what Adorno understands by the negative dialectics of freedom.

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