

ADORNO AND THE MODERN
ETHOS OF FREEDOM

COLIN W. HEARFIELD

**B.A. Macquarie University, Sydney.
B.A. L'Université de Montréal, Montreal.
M.A. (Hons.) The University of New England,
Armidale.**

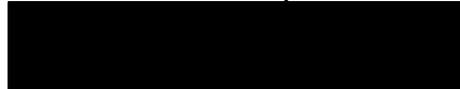
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DECLARATION

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.

ABSTRACT

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'.¹ 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.

¹ T.W. Adorno, 'Letters to Walter Benjamin' [18th March 1936] in *Aesthetics and Politics* ed. R. Taylor, London, New Left Books, 1977, p. 123. Adorno is here referring to the cultural cleavage between the music of Schoenberg and the American film industry.

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