

A. INTRODUCTION

Earlier claims to be modern, notably during the fifth, twelve, and seventeenth centuries, were articulated through the renewed *ethos* of an idealised past - respectively, early Christianity, ancient Greece and Rome.¹ In contrast the culture of the modern, which emerges during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe, rejects any glorification of past historical models. For what it is to be modern now means dispensing with all forms of heteronomous authority. This is evident in the decline of previously dominant social practices such as feudal servitude and religious piety, which had been institutionally maintained through the divine right of monarchs and an all but universal belief in the omnipotence of a Christian God. The emergence of sovereign democratic nation states, the intensification of bourgeois commodity production and exchange, and an increased sense of personal autonomy are each signified in the historical events known as the French and Industrial revolutions, and the Enlightenment. In effect, modern culture is a culture whose most cherished claim is that of freedom. A further sign of this emerging *ethos* of freedom is evident in the shift from the stylistic orthodoxies governing neo-Classical art to the more lyrical, expressive style of Romanticism.² From a philosophical perspective, the shift to the modern *ethos* of freedom is marked by the rejection of any transcendent, metaphysical Being and its traditional function as an *a priori* foundation of moral practice. With this dismissal of any transcendent moral authority, modern philosophy confronts the task of articulating a practical reason adequate to the modern *ethos* of freedom.

Modern conceptions of the relation between practical reason and action (theory and practice) are closely tied, Adorno argues, to the relation of subject and object. Instances of seventeenth century literature, some decades prior to Descartes, provide an early modern consideration of these relations. Shakespeare's '*Hamlet*', Adorno indicates, 'is as much the proto-history of the individual in its subjective reflection as it is the drama of the individual paralysed into inaction by that reflection'.³ Here the failed attempt to bring action under the control of self-reflective thought has tragic consequences. In a

¹ J. Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity' tr. S. Ben-Habib in *New German Critique* no.22 1981.

² Max Paddison presents a similar account of these socio-cultural shifts in his *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* London, Kahn and Averill, 1996, pp.27-28.

³ T.W. Adorno. 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis' [1969] in *Critical Models: interventions and catchwords* tr. H.W. Pickford, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p.260.

more comic response, Cervantes' character Don Quixote attempts to resolve this self-reflective impasse through an insistence on practice, and thereby compensate for the loss of already historically defunct, courtly ideals. Practical reason is here overrun by an impulsive drive to action, the outcome of which, at least for the reader, is always fraught with failure. What becomes manifest in both instances is an apparently unbridgeable gap between thought and action, subject and object.

A consciousness of theory and praxis must be produced that neither divides the two such that theory becomes powerless and praxis becomes arbitrary, nor refracts theory through the archbourgeois primacy of practical reason proclaimed by Kant and Fichte. Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis; already the ideology of the purity of thinking deceives about this. Thinking has a double character: it is immanently determined and rigorous, and yet an inalienably real mode of behaviour in the midst of reality. To the extent that subject, the thinking substance of philosophers, is object, to the extent that it falls within object, subject is already also practical. The irrationality of praxis that continually resurfaces however - its aesthetic archetype are the sudden random actions by which Hamlet carries out his plan and in carrying it out fails - unceasingly animates the illusion of the absolute division between subject and object. Where subject is inveigled into believing that object is something absolutely incommensurable, the communication between the two becomes the prey of blind fate.⁴

Each of the modern philosophies of freedom considered in the following exposition are critical attempts to overcome this seemingly persistent gap and so establish an irrefutable link between theory and practice. The manner in which they undertake this task reveals a variety of different responses.

While the relation of theory and practice is important in any discourse on freedom, it is not a question I pursue thematically beyond this introduction. Here I give a brief account of Adorno's understanding of that relation, since its 'speculative' character conditions my latter attempts to reveal the theoretical instabilities of those other philosophies of freedom under discussion. Suffice it to say at this juncture that I do not undertake an open-cut examination of the relation between theory and practice in the main body of this work, although it remains a point of reference to which I occasionally refer. What I do attempt is an appraisal of the coherence of each these philosophies of freedom by way of Adorno's technique of immanent critique.

Adorno's understanding of the relation between theory and practice is perhaps best set in relief through reference to Horkheimer's 'Traditional and Critical Theory'⁵ and

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.261.

their collaborative work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁶ Horkheimer distinguishes traditional from critical theory firstly in terms of its differing cognitive interest in relation to social practices. Traditional theory is characterised by its technical, scientific interest in the efficient control or manipulation of existing social structures for the sake of preserving current forms of economic and political power. Critical theory is characterized by an emancipatory interest with respect to the social community generally, by an interest in freedom that questions the overall social framework of existing economic and political relations. Horkheimer further clarifies the distinction between traditional and critical theory in terms of an investigator's methodological relation to the object of study. For the traditional theorist the social object under investigation is considered extrinsic to its theoretical projections. However the means-end rationality of this instrumental, goal-directed theory effectively subsumes or incorporates that non-identical social object within the necessary truth of its all-determining, conceptual *ratio*. In contrast to this largely unreflected subterfuge, critical theory considers those social practices that form its particular object of study as neither wholly external to nor fully reducible to its own conceptual apparatus. Rather critical theory perceives itself as both a determining and determined aspect of those social relations.

While the technical capacity of modern society already holds the potential for producing a community of free individuals, any conceptually orchestrated blueprint for social reconciliation, Horkheimer argues, will degenerate into ideological dogma. In effect '[t]he attempt legitimately to determine practical goals by thinking must always fail'.⁷ The function of critical theory is thus not so much to specify practical goals for the actualisation of freedom, but rather to elucidate the manner in which human sufferings are maintained or reinforced through contemporary social relations.

[T]he first consequence of the theory which urges a transformation of society as a whole is only an intensification of the struggle with which the theory is connected.⁸

Now it is just such an intensification of the practical struggle for freedom that Horkheimer and Adorno theoretically accomplish in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here, they argue, the modern claim to enlightenment, where scientific understanding liberates

⁵ M. Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' [1937] tr. M. O'Connell in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* Continuum, New York, 1992.

⁶ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944] tr. J Cumming, London and New York, Verso, 1989.

⁷ M. Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory' in *op. cit.*, p.211.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.219.

society from the blind fate of nature by bringing the latter under its technical control for the benefit of all, has turned distinctly sour. In the social context of modern industry, the technical interest guiding scientific understanding translates as the specifically bourgeois interest in maintaining its dominant economic and political power. Under the auspices of a scientifically oriented conceptual *ratio*, the rationality of freedom has been reduced to the instrumental pragmatics of short-term strategic success.

With the abandonment of thought, which in its reified form of mathematics, machine, and organisation avenges itself on [those] who have forgotten it, enlightenment has relinquished its own realization.⁹

Unwilling to see past its much-touted reforms of already existing institutions of economic and political power, the pragmatic claim to freedom reveals nothing more than an instance of social reification. Under these conditions, the claim to freedom becomes an ideological fetter. The contemporary bourgeois claim to the actuality of freedom is nothing more than myth; an unenlightened sign of actual unfreedom.

This dialectic of enlightenment, where a pragmatically directed escape from mythical traditions reverts to myth and unfreedom, is evident, Adorno and Horkheimer contend, in one of the earliest texts of Western civilisation. In the cultural shift from the ahistorical traditions of early Greek mythology to the more enlightened historical consciousness of epic narrative, evident in Homer's *Odyssey*, such a reversal is clearly apparent. The Sirens episode in particular, they argue, is a parable of this dialectic of enlightenment. Here Odysseus adopts two strategically related plans for escaping an otherwise imminent death; a death brought on through being drawn overboard to a watery grave by the intoxicating pleasure of the Sirens' song. The first is to plug the ears of his crew with wax, so they may all the more vigorously row beyond the Sirens' alluring, but illusory promise of reconciliation with the past. What makes this promise illusory is a concomitant denial of future possibilities. Bound to the past, one is equally bound to the will of the mythical gods and the sacrifice of cattle. The happiness offered by the Sirens is a false happiness; a happiness whose only horizon is death. To avoid this deadly fate -

The labourers ... must doggedly sublimate in additional effort the drive that impels to diversion. And so they become practical.¹⁰

The second piece of cunning involves Odysseus being bound to the mast of his ship, so that while he may experience the Sirens' seductive call to happiness, he will remain

⁹ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* op. cit., p.41. {translation modified between brackets}

physically unable to be drawn to an early death. Adorno and Horkheimer interpret this as a classic instance of bourgeois asceticism - a denial of false pleasures in the name of self-preservation. Once out of range of hearing, the plan is to have Odysseus released on a given signal. The crew, however, not believing they are beyond the Sirens' call, and fearing for their own lives as well as that of their master, refuse to release him. In effect the crew not only perpetuate their own oppression, but they bind Odysseus to his role as master under the self-preserving ruse of an instrumental pragmatics; and this, ostensibly, for the sake of the common good. Having escaped the oppressive structures of mythical culture, Odysseus and his crew are now constrained anew by this self-preserving rationality. It turns against them by reinforcing the separation of master and slave, of intellectual and manual practices, in the name of freedom and social progress.

Governed by the pragmatic link between theory and practice, enlightened reason undermines the social freedom to which it makes claim. Some contemporary manifestations of this self-preserving, instrumental pragmatics are evident in the cost-cutting efficiencies of economic rationalism and in the moral guidelines for social behaviour dished up by the entertainment and media industries. Further instances of this short-term, pragmatic thinking are evident in the political detention of unwanted asylum seekers, and in recent attempts at ethnic cleansing for the sake of preserving national sovereignty. Moreover, modern corporate and state bureaucracies generate a climate of fear and isolation, forcing adjustment on the part of all 'clients' to social practices which, in the name of the common good, surreptitiously obscure their coercive, deforming effects. The morality of rights and entitlements is at once a morality of blame and revenge. Under these conditions contemporary declamations concerning the actuality of freedom and social progress are more indicative of psychological and spiritual repression. No differently from Odysseus and his crew, the modern promise of freedom, of an escape from mythic enthrallment, returns socially as the myth of scientific pragmatism and actual unfreedom. In view of this historical dialectic, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that '[i]f enlightenment does not accommodate reflection on this recidivist element, then it seals its own fate'.¹¹ Again, as they point out some pages later, '[t]he point is rather that the Enlightenment *must examine itself*, if [humanity is] not to be wholly betrayed'.¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.xv. {Adorno's italics and translation modified between brackets}

As we remember from the Sirens episode, enlightened reason has its origin in an act of sacrificial cunning, not only for the sake of immediate self-preservation, however, but also for the sake of freedom from nature's unpredictable demands for sacrifice. By transfiguring the form of sacrifice, such that it becomes an act of self-domination through a renunciation of immediate pleasure, Odysseus and his crew escape the mythological world of natural gods. Unknowingly, however, they also instigate a new form of domination with equally mythic proportions - that of an instrumental, pragmatic rationality. Pragmatic reason effectively supplants one form of domination with another - that of an unrestrained capacity to master nature, including oneself and others. Nevertheless within this dialectic of enlightenment, Adorno argues, there lies an implicit critique of domination and sacrifice generally. Rather than simply a figure whose adventures form a parable of the emergence of enlightened, instrumental reason -

Odysseus is at the same time a sacrifice for the abrogation of sacrifice. His masterful renunciation, as a struggle against myth, stands in for a society that no longer demands renunciation and domination: one that masters itself, not in order to coerce itself and others, but for reconciliation.¹³

This reconciliation with nature, others and oneself depends, however, on the recognition of instrumental reason, with its continued demand for sacrifice, as having assumed the unreflected, mythic quality of a repressive second nature. Only through remembrance of what has here been lost, namely our affectively mediated relation to 'first' nature, does reason redeem the possibility of enlightenment and freedom. As Hullot-Kentor puts it -

The intention of the Odysseus essay - itself an act of organisation and control - is the recovery of the *telos* of reason through memory of nature and is therefore the most emphatic effort of reason conceivable.¹⁴

What distinguishes this recollection of 'first' nature from simple nostalgia, and what differentiates the recovery of the lost *telos* of freedom from mere wishful thinking, is their negatively determined or critical relation to the repressive, sacrificial demands of modern, instrumental culture.

Before further explicating Adorno's understanding of the link between theory and practice, I should like to indicate very briefly the positions taken on this matter by those other philosophies of freedom under consideration. In so doing I shall outline the organisational structure of this work.

¹³ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment' tr. R. Hullot-Kentor in *New German Critique* no.56, 1992, p.120. This piece is a re-translation of the first excursus in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* op. cit., p.56.

Adorno's critique of modern culture is at once a critique of the primacy accorded practical reason since Kant and Fichte; a primacy, moreover, which almost invariably leads to a total or ambivalent claim to the unity of theory and practice. These differences arise insofar as the unity of theory and practice is postulated according to different and opposed modes of rationality, that of a conceptual *ratio* and an existential *poiesis*. On the one hand, Kant, Hegel, and Habermas respond to the questions of freedom and practice through the transcendental, moral objectivity of a conceptual *ratio*. On the other hand, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault articulate these questions according to an aesthetically shaped ethics or existential *poiesis*. Neither Habermas nor Foucault conforms strictly to this characterisation by virtue of the priority they give to communicative consensus and power/knowledge relations respectively. Nonetheless it may be argued that communicative action occurs precisely by way of cognitive rational argument. Coming to consensus on the best available argument amounts to the communicative injunction of a conceptual *ratio*, where the 'we' reappears as a self-reflexive, singular subject. With Foucault, I would argue, modern power/knowledge relations form the socio-cultural context in which individual selves emerge with specific existential concerns. Caring for the self by way of aesthetically agonistic practices is nothing short of existential *poiesis*.

Kant's and Hegel's otherwise different logics of freedom are both concerted attempts to make the unity of theory and practice actual through the now secular metaphysics of a conceptual *ratio*. Kant claims to do so through the self-reflective transcendentalism of a moral imperative. Here the will is free to the extent that it chooses to act on the basis of an inner judgement concerning the potential universalisability of its action. Self-reflection must answer the question, whether others would make the same decision under the same conditions, affirmatively before an action may be considered morally just. Insofar as this categorical imperative is the conceptually rational condition of possible freedom, acting in accordance with this categorical imperative is itself an act of freedom. Hegel on the other hand presents this unity in terms of reason's legal embodiment in the constitution and ethical life of the modern democratic nation state. That is to say, the inter-subjective recognition of individual rights and responsibilities reflected in the laws of the modern nation state are nothing less than the practice of freedom. The historical rationality of Hegel's world Spirit is such that it finally produces

¹⁴ R. Hullot-Kentor, 'Back to Adorno' in *Telos* no.81, 1989, p.24.

through its own self-reflective dialectic, the actuality of freedom in the constitutional monarchy of Prussia.

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger reject the conceptual *ratio* through which these logics of freedom develop. Instead they articulate the possibility of freedom as an existential *poiesis*. In short, they offer an aesthetic evaluation of freedom and existence. The practice of freedom for Nietzsche involves an aesthetically mediated adoption of ethical values that are specifically life affirming. The unity of aesthetic evaluation and practical life emerges in the exemplary will to power of the *Übermensch*. The will to power over oneself carries an affective pathos where the practice of living one's life is viewed as an ongoing work of art. Nevertheless this unity remains an unachievable goal, perpetually disrupted by the chaotic effects of fate. Nietzsche's existential relation of theory and practice reveals an eternally recurrent reversal of unity and disunity, of freedom and unfreedom. When Heidegger, like Adorno, argues against the primacy of practical reason, he nevertheless discards, unlike Adorno, any notion of subjective will. With Heidegger the question of freedom is addressed as the 'poetic' contemplation of an otherwise unthinkable ontological difference between Being and being-in-the-world (*Dasein*). The radical indeterminacy of this notion of ontological difference becomes, however, that point where freedom, death, and the thought of nothingness converge in what Heidegger considers the essential belonging together of 'man' and Being. Since the essential truth of Being is freedom, 'man' becomes free to the extent that he contemplates the existential nothingness of Being, namely death. With the rejection of any practical will, the question of theory and practice immediately dissolves. The residue of this dissolution, however, is Heidegger's authentic, *angst*-ridden moment of deathly solitude.

Despite their opposed politics of truth, Foucault and Habermas present definitively pragmatic accounts of freedom and the relation between theory and practice. Foucault, similarly to Nietzsche, develops an aesthetically oriented pragmatics of freedom that is critical of scientific instrumentalism and its governing conceptual *ratio*. Like Nietzsche, the instrumental character of power is discursively transfigured in a self-reflexive aesthetic of freedom. Having set out to dissolve the aporias of the conceptual *ratio* by way of this existential *poiesis*, Foucault's experimental philosophy of freedom nevertheless reproduces that ambivalent, inconclusive response concerning the unity and disunity of theory and practice already encountered in Nietzsche. Moreover, when situated within the ontological immanence of historically recurrent relations of power, Foucault's aesthetically valued relation of theory and practice dissolves any determinate

difference between freedom and unfreedom. Indeed the term 'aesthetic' with Foucault no longer implicates an affective response to the world but rather, similarly to Heidegger, an ontological sense of cultural belonging to the epoch of modernity. In effect the drive to freedom is already somatically inscribed through socio-cultural practices which in turn limit freedom through their culturally reproductive immanence. The critical force of Foucault's social theory is thereby severely undercut.

Habermas' non-strategic, communicative pragmatics, on the other hand, is critical of all forms of instrumental rationality whether conceptual or aesthetic. He situates both forms of instrumental reason within what he calls the communicatively distorting, systems world of money and power. In contrast, the historical rationalisation of the communicative lifeworld has, as its inherent *telos*, the cognitive ideal of undistorted intersubjective consensus. If socially instituted, Habermas argues, the cognitively mediated process of communicative action would constitute the actuality of social freedom. While Habermas acknowledges the gap between this normative theory of communicative justification and the more practical application of appropriate norms within specific social communities, he nevertheless gestures towards their unity insofar as the application of moral values is itself equally tied to the discursive principle of consensus. Moral theory, however, cannot sufficiently elucidate the political substance of freedom – its cognitive link to practice remains uncertain. And so Habermas argues -

Moral theory must bequeath this question unanswered to the philosophy of law; the unity of practical reason can be realized in an unequivocal manner only within a network of public forms of communication and practices in which the conditions of rational collective will formation have taken on concrete institutional form.¹⁵

Habermas goes on in his later text *Between Facts and Norms* to explain just how a philosophy of law accomplishes this unity of theory and practice. He states -

Law is two things at the same time: a system of knowledge and a system of action. We can understand it just as much as a text that consists of normative propositions and interpretations, as we can view it as an institution, that is, as a complex of normatively regulated action. Because motivations and value orientations are interwoven with each other in law as an action system, legal norms have the immediate effectiveness for action that moral judgments as such lack. At the same time, legal institutions differ from naturally emergent institutional orders in virtue of their comparatively high degree of rationality; they give firm shape to a system of knowledge that has been doctrinally refined and coupled with a principled morality.

¹⁵ J. Habermas, *Justification and Application* tr. C. Cronin, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993, p.17.

Because law is simultaneously established this way at the levels of culture and society, it can *offset* the weakness of a morality that exists primarily as knowledge.¹⁶

What remains uncertain, however, is whether Habermas thereby defends contemporary social norms and the actual unity of theory and practice, or whether, as argued in his postscript to *Between Facts and Norms*, he maintains a critical, speculative role for theory through the counterfactual ideal of communicative consensus.¹⁷ What appears to create this ambiguity, I would argue, is Habermas' notion of an already inherent *telos* of social consensus, which, if it is to have any impact on practice, must also remain external to this immanent process of communicative action. However here an echo of the suppressed emancipatory and instrumental character of communicative action aporetically reappears. The actual unity or disunity of communicative theory and social practice remains indeterminate; and so too the actuality or otherwise of freedom.

Whether cognitive or aesthetic, theories that defend pragmatism are theories that hold to some form of unbreachable social immanence. Critical of both positions, Adorno argues that '[t]heory steals itself back from the system's immanence only where it shirks its pragmatic fetters, no matter how modified they may be'.¹⁸ In contrast to the immanent identity of theory and practice so prevalent in the pragmatics of freedom, Adorno argues that theory and practice are best viewed as polar opposites. In effect theory does not so much appear in practice as a cognitive or aesthetic ideal but as the persistent critique of practice. Practice, for its part, 'appears in theory merely, and indeed necessarily, as a blind spot, as an obsession with what is being criticized'.¹⁹ Theory is the negatively determinate mediation of practice. Indeed the function of theory, Adorno argues, is to intensify the critique of already existing practices.

Adorno's concern here is to maintain the autonomy of critical theory against its disqualification through the socially immanent limitations of any cognitive or aesthetically formulated pragmatics. While theory is shaped by already historically embedded social practices and these practices in turn remain irrevocably tied to theory as an explanatory tool, theory nevertheless retains a differential autonomy when critical of

¹⁶ J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* [1992] tr. W. Rehg, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996, p.114.
{Habermas' italics}

¹⁷ Deborah Cook alerted me to this situation, a discussion of which may be found in her paper 'Critical Strategems in Adorno and Habermas: Theories of Ideology and the Ideology of Theory' in *Historical Materialism* vol.6, 2000, pp.67-87. Cook addresses the political implications of Habermas' philosophy in more detail in 'Habermas on reason and revolution' in *Continental Philosophy Review* vol.34, 2001, pp.321-338.

¹⁸ T.W. Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis' in *op. cit.*, p.260.

contemporary practices. Without autonomy, theory's potentially revolutionary impact on social practices is defused in the instrumental barbarism of 'civilised' progress.

[T]rue revolutionary practice depends on the intransigence of theory in the face of the insensibility with which society allows thought to ossify.²⁰

Nor does the absence of any normative, practical plan for universal reconciliation indicate an attitude of resignation before this modern, fully administered society; a society, moreover, which tolerates protest knowing it to be nothing more than the conditioned impotence of pseudo-activity. Defending the oft-cited charge of resignation made against him in this regard, Adorno states -

The utopian impulse in thinking is all the stronger, the less it objectifies itself as utopia - a further form of regression - whereby it sabotages its own realization. Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part, such thinking takes a position as a figuration of [practice] which is more closely related to a [practice] truly involved in change than is a position of mere obedience for the sake of praxis.²¹

Designing pragmatic solutions to contemporary social contradictions is a reified response to a society that already defends its ongoing capacity for immanent economic and social reform. Mindful of these reifying implications, theory is best employed as a radical negation of the modern fetish for practical reason.

Such awareness, without any preconceptions as to where it might lead, would be the first condition for an ultimate break in society's omnipotence.²²

For these reasons, as Martin Jay suggests, Adorno's 'reluctant willingness to endure the state of performative contradiction may be worth pondering'.²³

¹⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.278.

²⁰ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* op. cit., p.41.

²¹ T.W. Adorno, 'Resignation' [1969] tr. W. Blomster in *Telos* no.35, 1978, p.168.

²² T.W. Adorno, 'Society' tr. F. Jameson in *Salmagundi* no.10-11, 1969-70, p.153.

²³ M. Jay, 'The Debate over Performative Contradiction' in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment* eds. A. Honneth, T. McCarthy, C. Offe, and A. Wellmer, tr. W. Rehg, Cambridge Mass., MIT, 1992, p.276.

B. LOGICS OF FREEDOM :

KANT AND HEGEL

B1)

FREEDOM AND MORAL REASON : KANT

Introduction

Kant's concern with freedom may be read as an indirect defence of the rising bourgeois class' dissatisfaction with the political constraints inherent in the then contemporary regimes of European aristocratic power. For Kant's self-reflective principle of freedom radically undermines the traditional heteronomy of divinely instituted monarchic authority through which aristocratic power was ideologically maintained. The liberal implications of Kant's defence of freedom are made explicit in his article 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'.¹ Here Kant articulates the concept of freedom in terms of a personal autonomy in the 'public use' of reason. This means the ability to debate rationally and critically in the public domain the authority of the state and its institutions. To dare to think for oneself in the public domain in light of a universally rational, moral law was a sign of maturity, of enlightened self-consciousness. Following the impact of the French Revolution on European society, Kant goes so far as to adduce a moral disposition in the human race which seeks to improve the conditions leading to freedom and universal peace.² On the basis of this moral disposition, Kant argues, all societies have the natural right to a civil constitution establishing their sovereignty. It was this notion of public right, already put forward by Kant in his small treatise on *Perpetual Peace*,³ which allowed him to defend an harmonious relation between morality and politics. Moreover, as long as communities seek to provide themselves with such a constitution, which equally rejects any aggressive tendencies

¹ I. Kant, 'An Answer to the Question : What is Enlightenment?' [1784], tr. H. Nisbet in *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, Cambridge, CUP, 1970.

² I. Kant, 'The Contest of Faculties' [1797] in *ibid.*, pp.181-182.

³ I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace* [1795] tr. L. White Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1957.

towards neighbouring states, human progress towards universal moral enlightenment, Kant argues, will remain unimpeded and assured.

Kant situates the motivating drive to freedom in the desire and expectation of greater inner personal worth. This desire does not stem from the sensuous realm of inclination and impulse, however, but from the intelligible domain of moral reason and responsibility. We are, as Kant puts it, ‘involuntarily constrained to do so by the Idea of freedom - that is, of not being dependent on *determination* by causes in the sensible world’.⁴ Yet the desire for greater inner personal worth, as Adorno points out, is driven precisely by the need to escape the heteronomous causality of sensuous impulse and blind desire. Hence the drive to freedom is indeed produced by that same sensible world, albeit as the outright negation of that domain.

Transcendental and Noumenal Free Will

Kant first addressed the question of freedom in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁵ Here the contradiction between free will and a condition of unfreedom, arising through our subjection to heteronomous laws of nature, becomes the ground for wholly eliminating the latter from the question of freedom. Similarly, Kant dismisses the contradictory implications of any heteronomous causality that might impede the claim to freedom in his *Critique of Practical Reason*.⁶ Kant goes on to consider that claim solely in terms of an inner, self-reflective moral reason. Indeed we are free, he argues, only in so far as our will to act is governed by a transcendental principle of moral universalisability. The question of free will is thus dependent on the universalisability of our otherwise subjective maxims. The universalisability of our subjective maxims amounts to the will’s self-reflective concordance with the will of all, and constitutes what Kant refers to as the moral law. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* Kant had already articulated this principle as a categorical imperative, which states, ‘I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal moral law*’.⁷ Without this transcendental moral imperative, which subjects our various maxims of

⁴ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* [1785] tr. H. Patton, New York, Harper and Row, 1964, pp.122-123. {Kant’s italics}

⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781 and 1787] tr. N. Kemp Smith, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1978, pp.409-415.

⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* [1788] tr. L. White Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1980, p.4.

⁷ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* op. cit., p.70. {Kant’s italics}

conduct to the rational test of universalisability, free will would not be possible. Whether conceived as a guide to the exercise of free will or as a standard by which to judge our actions as having been free, this principle of universalisability becomes the essential ground of any claim to freedom. Acting for the sake of freedom entails the self-reflective subordination of the will to this transcendental principle of moral universalisability.

Taking action in line with this self-reflective, transcendental judgement, which concerns an agreement or unity of the individual will and that of others as a universal, normative entity, constitutes the sole condition of possibility for free will. Kant describes this agreement, however, in terms of the will's 'free submission' to the moral law.

The consciousness of free submission of the will to the law, combined with an inevitable constraint imposed only by our own reason on all inclinations, is respect for the law. ... The action which is objectively practical according to this law and excludes inclination from its determining grounds is called duty.⁸

This indicates that individuals have no choice, if they wish to be free, other than to act in accordance with a law that demands first and foremost a consideration of duty. Kant reveals a similar disjuncture in his response to the question of enlightenment. Here the maturity or freedom of being able to speak with a critical voice in the public domain jars with the apparent unfreedom of necessarily submitting to one's everyday social roles and duties. Kant's concept of freedom thereby burdens the subject with the guilt of knowing itself morally bound, and so unfree, despite all claims to the contrary. Kant's moral *ratio*, Adorno argues, legitimates both freedom and its blocking.

Kant ostensibly dissolves this contradiction of free will arising through the determining causal implications of the categorical imperative by considering free will as an absolutely originating cause of events in the world. That is to say, Kant attributes to the transcendental subject of free will an equally noumenal or sensible form.⁹ What allows Kant to proceed in this manner is his claim that the transcendental concept of freedom has the same practical force 'as if [the individual's will] could be pronounced free in itself on grounds valid for theoretical philosophy'.¹⁰ Kant thereby grants the subject a freedom in the natural world whose possibility is otherwise clearly denied in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What now emerges, however, is the difficulty of conceiving this noumenal moral subject as situated within and yet distinct from any temporal condition.

⁸ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* [1788] op. cit., p.83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

To share in freedom, according to Kant's doctrine, the noumenal subject would have to be extratemporal, [quoting Kant], 'a pure intelligence in its temporally not definable existence'. The saving urge [for freedom] makes an existence of this noumenon - since nothing could be predicated of it otherwise - and yet it is to be undefinable in time.¹¹

The noumenal subject, while it is the origin of certain temporal relations cannot, however, be conceived as a phenomenal entity within time. In other words, despite being positioned as the origin of the sensible, phenomenal realm, noumenal free will nevertheless exists outside time. The non-temporal compatibility of the noumenal and transcendental will now enables their interchangeability when required.

What steps in as a *deus ex machina* is the concept of the 'thing-in-itself'. Arcane and indefinite, it marks a blind spot of the thought; its indefiniteness alone allows it to be used as an explanation, as needed.¹²

While the temporal aspect of noumenal free will shores up the subject's claim to spontaneity, its non-temporal being-in-itself echoes Kant's assertion that the categorical imperative governing transcendental free will is an *a priori* fact of pure moral reason.¹³

When Kant implicitly acknowledges the unavoidable tension between freedom and unfreedom in the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and hence the determining limitation of what is rational in the will, there is some truth in his position. However, when he later dismisses this limitation, as falling outside the noncontradictory laws of reason, and declares the moral law to be an *a priori* fact of reason, Kant's categorical imperative takes on a distinctly self-righteous and authoritarian air. For the necessarily given, noumenal aspect of free will can be read as a legitimating moral mask for particular self-interests; interests, moreover, which may be defended as universal and then coercively foisted on others. Kant's attempt to save free will from the deterministic constraints of conscience and duty may be read as an unrestricted license for the self-arrogation of moral and political right.

Once [the moral law] is held to be self-understood, excused from rational reflection, the self-understood character offers a refuge to the unelucidated remnant and to repression.¹⁴

¹⁰ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* op. cit., pp.115-116.

¹¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.253. The citation from Kant may be found in the *Critique of Practical Reason* op. cit., p.118. Beck's translation reads 'as pure intelligence, existing without temporal determination'.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.254. {Adorno's italics}

¹³ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* op. cit., p.31.

‘The *ratio*’, as Adorno further indicates, ‘turns into an irrational authority’.¹⁵ Conversely when the will, in bad conscience, fails to claim this authority as its own, it remains subject to the repressive constraints of moral universalisability. Under the auspices of Kant’s transcendental moral reason, any will to change the world is permeated with the repressive forces to which it ‘rationally’ objects. In other words, the self-reflective constitution of free will occurs precisely by way of an internalisation of those already dominant moral values sustaining modern socio-cultural practices. In effect, Kant’s transcendental moral subject becomes the photographic negative of whatever social constraints are said to be naturally and yet inexplicably necessary. Despite itself, the self-reflected positivity of Kant’s will to freedom becomes a ground for unfreedom.

Contrary to Kant’s advice that the concept of unfreedom, in view of its contradictory and so valueless form, be cut from the store of rational categories, Adorno insists that, since Hegel, the problem of contradictory forms is no longer simply a matter of logical procedure. Indeed Kant’s formal dismissal of any heteronomous causality does not magically dismantle the contradiction.

Since freedom, to Kant, amounts to reason’s invariant identity with itself even in the practical realm, it loses what in common usage distinguishes reason from the will. Due to its total rationality, the will becomes irrational. *The Critique of Practical Reason* moves in a delusive context. It has the mind serve as a surrogate for action, which is to be nothing but the sheer mind. Thus freedom is sabotaged: its Kantian carrier, reason, coincides with the pure law. Freedom would need what Kant calls heteronomous.¹⁶

Yet Kant dismisses the heteronomously driven maxim as irrational, as belonging to the domain of unfreedom. The contradiction between freedom and unfreedom, which Kant is at pains to eradicate, is considered by Adorno to be entirely objective. With this in mind Adorno proposes taking sides neither with freedom against chance, nor with freedom against rationality, for the question of freedom, he argues, requires a dialectical legality. The rational will, he maintains, is dependent on somatic impulses without which it would have no presence. Equally these sensuous drives depend for their successful resolution on the self-reflective capacity of the will. They cannot be excluded the one from the other without giving rise to dogma.

¹⁴ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.242.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.261.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.237.

Far from eliminating the contradictory implications of his concept of free will, Kant's notion of noumenal free will merely obscures his exclusion of sensuous experience from the question of freedom. When the experience of free will is confined to the intelligible precincts of self-reflection, Kant effectively denies the physical impulses any mediating role in the will's formation. Yet without such impulses there would be no will, and without that will consciousness itself would not arise as the organising faculty of those same impulses. The will, Adorno argues 'is the force that enables consciousness to leave its own domain and so to change what merely exists; its recoil is resistance'.¹⁷ Without this dialectical understanding of the will, the idea that society could be other than, or indeed better than it now is, tends to disappear. In effect, under the spell of Kant's transcendental identity of the will and self-reflective consciousness, the Kantian subject, no different in this respect from that given lip service in Positivism, adjusts at all costs to already institutionalised moral values. Kant's transcendental will acquires a positivity that in practice becomes a neurotic obsession with the social requirement of rational self-control. In Adorno's words, it becomes 'the sedimented control of [a person's] inner nature'.¹⁸ Moreover, in repressing the contradictory tension between sensuous drives and rational self-control, the will becomes afflicted with the constant guilt of never fully achieving that control. A more rational and psychologically sane response, Adorno argues, would be to acknowledge the contradictory tension of impulse and self-reflection within the will. Such acknowledgment would render the transcendental fiction of spontaneous free will altogether transparent, and would help dissolve the socially orchestrated nightmare of rational self-control.

Moral and Social Causality

Analogous with Kant's claim that we necessarily think in a causal fashion for the sake of cognitive unity is his claim that the categorical imperative is an *a priori* condition of freedom and moral reason. As well as being directed against Leibniz' metaphysics of an heteronomously causal God, the now subjectively immanent, *a priori* necessity undergirding Kant's concept of causality is directed equally against Hume's sceptical argument that causality is nothing but a conventional habit of thought. While Adorno agrees with Kant, against Hume, that causal explanation is not just social convention, he

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.241.

nevertheless remains critical of Kant's claim that causality is a categorical condition of thought in any *a priori* fashion. The upshot of Kant's insistence on causality as an *a priori* condition of moral reason is this -

If the constitution of causality by pure reason - which, after all is supposed to be freedom - is already subject to causality, freedom is so compromised beforehand that hardly any place for it remains outside a consciousness complaisant toward the law.¹⁹

If it is not to become the ground of an authoritarian claim to dictate moral values to others, the transcendental principle of universalisability can be implemented only in view of those values and practices that have already acquired a socially instituted legality. In other words, by drawing out the social implications of Kant's concept of causality, Adorno argues that Kant's self-reflective claim to freedom may be read as a tacit defence of such legality. In view of the rational necessity of Kant's categorical imperative, the claim to freedom becomes nothing more than a compliance with already normative, social imperatives. In other words, by way of its *a priori* necessity this supposedly enabling condition of freedom at once paradoxically disables it.

What appears as the noumenal exclusion of unfreedom from Kant's categorical imperative is no less the spell that a conceptual *ratio* casts over the consciousness of socially produced subjects. While this noumenal self creates the positive illusion of freedom in so far as freedom has been 'rationally' inscribed in social subjects, it simultaneously obscures the disabling effects of social causality. Only through an affective experience of these disabling effects, of the non-identical relation between free will and social causality, Adorno argues, will a subject break the spell of reason's *a priori* moral legality. Adorno's point here is that '[i]f in causality we are looking for a definition of things themselves - no matter how subjectively conveyed - such specification would open the perspective of freedom as opposed to the undiscriminated One of pure subjectivity.²⁰ Without a discriminating judgement concerning the immanent yet heteronomous relation of free will and social causality, the idea of freedom will remain tied to a socially inscribed legality that at once prevents it. Rather than being bound, in the interests of non-contradiction and social order, to the *a priori* necessity of Kant's categorical imperative, the idea of freedom also needs articulation according to the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.293. {translation modified between brackets}

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.248.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.249.

heteronomous causality of historically specific social practices. Moral judgement would then no longer arise through the abstract totality of a pure practical reason, but through the subject's affective, psychological mediation by actual social practices.

Rejecting any determining causality of the sensuous, sensible domain on the transcendental concept of free will, Kant's articulation of free will nevertheless depends on the repression of just that domain. That is to say, only by way of negating the sensible domain of unfreedom does Kant articulate the positive, self-reflective thesis of free will. Indeed without this negative mediation of the sensible domain there would be no conceivable manner in which Kant's moral law could have any significance for living human beings.

Even the feeling of sympathy and warmhearted fellow-feeling, when preceding the consideration of what is duty and serving as a determining ground, is burdensome even to right-thinking persons, confusing their considered maxims and creating the wish to be free from them and subject only to law-giving reason.²¹

Similarly, Kant rejects a potential social condition of universal happiness as the basis for moral law; and this, precisely in order to make sufficient his concept of a purely transcendental moral law. When Kant expands the maxim of self-love into a universal concern for the happiness of others, it is not so much the happiness of all, that necessarily governs the will, he argues, but its pure universal form.²² In other words, while the happiness of others might perhaps be universally agreed as an essential *telos* of humanity, what would give that happiness moral validity is only the form of universalisability acquired through an individual's transcendental application of the categorical imperative. In a second remark, Kant proceeds to reject the possibility that the happiness of others could ever satisfy the transcendental conditions of universalisability. For what happiness means, he argues, is dependent on the ever- changing 'data' of individual experience.

The principle of happiness can indeed give maxims, but never maxims which are competent to be laws of the will, even if universal happiness were made the object. For, since the knowledge of this rests on mere data of experience, as each judgment concerning it depends very much on the very changeable opinion of each person, it can give general but never universal rules; ... the variety of judgment must be infinite. This principle, therefore does not prescribe the same practical rules to all rational beings, even though all the rules go under the same name - that of happiness. The moral law, however, is thought of as objectively

²¹ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* op. cit., p.123.

²² *Ibid.*, p.35.

necessary only because it holds good for everyone having reason and will.

The maxim of self-love (prudence) merely advises; the law of morality commands.²³

This again indicates the negative mediation of what Kant regards as an all but legitimate social good by his transcendental concept of moral causality. However, what this negation indicates, Adorno argues, is the bourgeois ambivalence between the promise of universal happiness and its simultaneous denial in the hierarchical, authoritarian relations that characterise the modern, workplace environment.

The social causality at work in Kant's moral law becomes more evident in his variation of the categorical imperative - that 'humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply [be treated] as a means, but always at the same time as an end'.²⁴ While Kant may have regarded the term 'humanity' simply as a regulative idea, as what is essentially human, Adorno argues that it has a more significant social import. Accordingly, he reinterprets this variation of Kant's categorical imperative in terms of its specific social implications. He states -

[E]very individual should be respected as a representative of the socialized human species, ... [s/he] is not a mere function of the [exchange] process. The difference of means and ends which Kant decisively stressed is a social difference; it is the difference between the subjects as merchandise, as labour power that can be managed to produce value, and the human beings who even in the form of such merchandise remain the subjects for whose sake the whole machinery is set in motion - the machinery in which they are forgotten and only incidentally satisfied. Without this perspective, the variant of the Imperative would be lost in a void.²⁵

Kant was perhaps not unaware of the social practices determining this imperative. This becomes apparent in Kant's later philosophy of history where he explicitly formulates a concept of social causality, albeit no longer in terms of individual conscience. In his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, the notion of a universal social antagonism, the 'unsocial sociability of men', is portrayed as a natural law driving individuals to establish a secure place within the social order, and so become free.²⁶ Kant

²³ *Ibid.*, p.37.

²⁴ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* op. cit., p.96. {translation modified between brackets}

²⁵ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.257. {translation modified between brackets}

²⁶ I. Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' in *Kant's Political Writings* op. cit., p.44.

thereby acknowledges an affinity between his formulation of the moral law and social causality.

The social causality evident in Kant's categorical imperative functions, however, through the self-reflective internalisation of its otherwise heteronomous machinations. The inescapable repression to which free will thereby becomes subject is more precisely the necessary causality of normative social values internalised in the self-reflective act of conscience. In effect, what assures Kant of the factuality of the moral law is not so much its transcendental *a priori* necessity, but the psychological force of what Freud later termed the super-ego. As Adorno puts it, Kant's categorical imperative 'presupposes the internalisation of repression as much as the full development of the ego'.²⁷ Just as Kant attempts to liquidate the repressive features of the categorical imperative in the claim to noumenal freedom, so too when Freud's pupil, Ferenczi, became critical of the unconsciously repressive function of the super-ego, he reclassifies it as an all but fully conscious, and so non-repressive apparatus. By upholding the moral value of the super-ego under these conditions, Ferenczi paradoxically denies the very possibility that psychological disturbances occur at all. Contrary to this psychoanalytic revisionism, a critique of the super-ego, Adorno argues, would more properly involve a critique of the internalised social values blocking the path not simply to individual autonomy but to a universal social freedom. The more the ego adjusts to the repressive necessities of its autonomous self-preservation, that is, the necessities of commodity production and exchange sustained ideologically through the communications and entertainment industries and administered socially through state and judicial institutions, the less that consciousness retains a critical drive to freedom.

Yet the potential for freedom does not lie in a psychological or philosophical defence of individual autonomy, but rather in the objective social contradictions which might destabilise an otherwise self-perpetuating system of economic, racial and sexual discrimination. If it is to remain relevant, the question of freedom will move beyond the phenomenological problematics of individual freedom, and will address contemporary social relations through the critical telescope of a still utopian reconciliation with nature. Individual freedom is dependent on the freedom of all, on the social solidarity of human society as a whole. It is just this utopian perspective that forms the negative pivot of

²⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., pp.271-272.

Adorno's critical social theory, and in whose spirit he critically rejects the politically authoritarian, socially integrative aspects of Kant's transcendental moral *ratio*.

A critique of the individual leads as far beyond the category of freedom as that category has been created in the unfree individual's image. ... But freedom need not remain what it was, and what it arose from. Ripening, rather, in the internalization of social coercion into conscience, with the resistance to social authority which critically measures that 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.²⁸

The presumption of universalisability, that a self-reflective individual can indeed correctly judge how others would act under the same conditions, is at once the presumption of an unmediated identity between particular and universal. It shows the arrogance of a conceptual *ratio* whose transcendental claim to reconciliation is nothing but an ideological mask of freedom. Acting in accordance with the categorical imperative remains an illusion of freedom, since freedom is here nothing more than a reflection of internalised social norms. There is nevertheless the suggestion of an objective, social reconciliation with nature, Adorno argues, in Kant's metaphysical postulate of freedom. Without this conceptually non-identical, utopian postulate, which concerns the objective freedom of all, self-reflective social critique would remain altogether indeterminate.

Individual and Society

Where Kant expands the idea of freedom beyond the notion of individual free will to that of a universal social freedom, in what he calls a kingdom of ends, his idea of freedom, however, again proves highly deceptive. Here, as indicated earlier, the categorical imperative is reformulated such that each would act towards their self and others '*never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end*'.²⁹ In conjunction with the imperative of universalisability, this would make possible, Kant argues, the formation of a free community under universally accepted social laws. Yet under the imperative of universalisability -

all purely rational beings would become indistinguishable from one another - characterized by rationality only, that is, by emptiness. The maxim guiding the behaviour of each would be the one guiding the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.275. {translation modified between brackets}

²⁹ I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* op. cit., p.96. {Kant's italics}

behaviour of all : agreement would no longer be a contingent matter, but a matter of necessity. Of the necessity of breaking everything down - including oneself.³⁰

The universalisability of individual ends, as conceived by Kant, subjects the individual to its own self-orchestrated disappearance in the kingdom of ends. Free will remains burdened with a moral law whose transcendental, conceptual *ratio* denies individual autonomy. Kant's claim to the self-reflective determination of free will, where responsibility and freedom become indistinguishable, is thus a form of narcissistic self-deception.

The more freedom the subject - and the community of subjects - ascribes to itself, the greater its responsibility; and before this responsibility it must fail in a bourgeois life which in practice has never yet endowed a subject with the unabridged autonomy accorded it in theory. Hence the subject must feel guilty.³¹

Kant's self-reflective moral principle turns against the individual, signalling a condition of unfreedom within the very claim to be free.

Adorno interprets this same contradictory outcome in the more socially specific terms of modern capitalist exchange. For Kant's rationality of moral universalisability, he argues, has indeed been institutionalised in the legality of universal rights and obligations stipulated by the modern bourgeoisie. With a capitalist society bent solely on efficient economic outcomes and ever-more effective social controls, however, these statutory laws, or more precisely the economic practices which they legitimate, now bind individuals to the universal imperative of economic productivity and competition.

The process of evolving individual independence is a function of the [exchange] society and terminates in the individual's abolition by integration. What produced freedom will recoil into unfreedom.³²

The enlightenment promise of freedom thereby turns against itself in the repressive constraints of economic and social self-preservation. In view of this dialectic, Adorno is critical of the false consciousness arising from Kant's identity of freedom with a purely self-reflective moral *ratio*. This self-reflective identity masks the mediation of the concept of freedom by heteronomous social relations.

Freedom can be defined in negation only, corresponding to the concrete form of a specific unfreedom.³³

³⁰ E. Bencivenga, 'Kant's Sadism' in *Philosophy and Literature* no.20, 1996, p44.

³¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.220.

³² *Ibid.*, p.262. {translation modified between brackets}

Adorno nevertheless acknowledges the progressive nature of Kant's concept of freedom in so far as it is no longer tied to principles emanating from some divinely instituted moral authority, whether of the political or religious variety. With Kant's idealism '[t]he subject becomes moral for itself'.³⁴

In view of the socially critical implications of Kant's metaphysical postulate of freedom, Adorno argues that the psychological objectivity of conscience apparent in Kant's categorical imperative forms an affinity with social solidarity and universal happiness. Without relinquishing his critique of Kant's transcendental moral reason, Adorno maintains that Kant's denial of psychology's capacity to formulate objective moral principles was more than just a matter of preserving the objectivity of philosophical judgements against those that refer only to the empirical generality of individual psychological conditions. Rather Kant's categorical imperative depends for its intelligibility on just this psychological generality. Indeed without this affinity to living subjects, Kant's categorical imperative would be altogether meaningless. Freud's notion of the super-ego shows just how Kant's transcendental moral law depends on the psychological objectivity of conscience. The individual experiences the categorical imperative as an objective rule of conscience, or what is, more precisely, an internalised social norm.

The objectivity of conscience vis-a-vis mankind is drawn from the objectivity of society, from the objectivity in and by which [people] live and which extends to the core of their individualization.³⁵

In view of this psychological objectivity, what Kant's categorical imperative reveals is not just the immanent, repressive effects of an otherwise heteronomous social causality, but also a sense of social solidarity that goes beyond particular self-interests. Referring to Kant's articulation of the social relations implicit in his categorical imperative in *The Metaphysics of Morals*,³⁶ Adorno comments -

Encoded in the late Kantian sentence that everyone's freedom need be curtailed only insofar as it impairs someone else's is a reconciled condition that would not only be above the bad universal, the coercive social mechanism, but above the obdurate individual who is a micro-

³³ *Ibid.*, p.231.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.239.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.282. {translation modified between brackets}

³⁶ Kant states 'Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law' in *The Metaphysics of Morals* [1797] tr. M. Gregor, Cambridge, CUP, 1998, p.24.

cosmic copy of that mechanism.³⁷

While the repressive aspect of conscience prolongs unfreedom, the sense of social solidarity that may equally attend the exercise of conscience indicates a critically utopian mediation of that repression. In Adorno's words, 'it takes the repressive form of conscience to develop the form of solidarity, in which the repressive one will be voided'.³⁸

Instead of defending the indisputable authority of social norms through the necessary *a priori* causality of an unerring categorical imperative, and so sanctioning individual repression, theory is more appropriately engaged, Adorno argues, in unravelling the negative dialectical relations of individual and society. Society is justly found wanting when it fails to meet the needs of its individual members. Yet the sheer assertion of individual free will also fails society in failing to grasp the extent of its own repression. In this failure the individual makes an imperative of self-preservation according to which already existing nation states are militarily and economically organised. Blinded by its own particularity, the individual perpetuates an antagonism inculcated by a society bent on competitive cunning and success. Against this misconceived individualism, Adorno argues -

The subject would be liberated only as an I reconciled with a not-I, and thus it would be also above freedom insofar as freedom is leagued with its counter-part, repression. How much aggression is so far inherent in freedom can be seen whenever, in the midst of general unfreedom, [people] act as if they were free.³⁹

Conversely, neither does freedom exist in the collectivism of modern people's democracies, where subjects lose their claim to individuality in their herding together under the ideological umbrella of capitalism's free market enterprise. Here, the binding together of otherwise atomised subjects through corporate labour practices and sports' entertainment is an illusory semblance of happiness and social solidarity. Freedom dissolves in the administering hierarchies of state and corporate management. With both collectivism and individualism there is a simulation of freedom; a false consciousness which veils the actual unfreedom of contemporary social relations.

Despite the redeeming metaphysics of a non-identical, utopian freedom, Kant's categorical imperative also pre-figures the false consciousness of both individualist and

³⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.283.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

collectivist concepts of freedom, where each is unable to go beyond the self-evident rationality of its own natural necessity. This naturalist deception in Kant's philosophy is enhanced through the strict separation or mutual exclusion of the sensuous and intelligible aspects of our being. In the intelligible world the moral law of universalisability is said to be a fact of reason, and so rightfully commands obedience of the individual to the collective will. In the sensible world, however, individual free will is simply given as a noumenal thing-in-itself, as a cause unbound by any collective causality. Both claims are attempts to rescue freedom from the destructive grip of the other, yet they become paradoxically just that unfreedom against which they were to guarantee protection. Not unaware of this difficulty, Kant nevertheless considers it resolved in so far as both are identical in the intelligible realm of self-reflection. The rationally necessary choice of choosing the categorical imperative, Kant argues, is at once the expression of free will. After all, the causality of the moral law is entirely immanent within the individual act of self-reflection. The individual will is thus not arbitrary, he maintains, nor the moral law coercive. Yet when Kant's transcendental moral law does establish relations with the sensible realm of nature, which it must if it is to remain intelligible, its repressive social function again becomes apparent. What is now imperative is the subordination of nature, understood here as a coverall concept for affective drives, phenomenal objects and other living beings, to the transcendental rationality of Kant's necessary moral law. Indeed this is the motivation behind Kant's prioritising practical over theoretical reason. As Marx shows, however, our modern experience of nature is more precisely an experience of instrumental mastery, an experience of nature's subordination to corporate economic imperatives. From this social perspective, what legitimates the moral law is not so much the idea of freedom but the bourgeois need to master nature for the sake of self-preservation. Kant's notion of maturity here translates simply as the ability to survive.

Kant's idea of freedom, while foreshadowing the possibility of social reconciliation, at once reveals a will ready to repress both itself and others through their systematic subordination to the universal imperative of social norms. Adorno refers to this contradiction and its critical illumination of contemporary society as the dialectic of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.283. {translation modified between brackets}

enlightenment. He further outlines this modern dialectical tension between freedom and repression evident in Kant's moral philosophy in the following passage.

As the transcendental, supra-individual self, reason comprises the idea of a free, human social life in which [people] organize themselves as the universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true universality : utopia. At the same time, however, reason constitutes the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material of subjugation.⁴⁰

What Kant and the Enlightenment envisaged as the rational development of individual autonomy becomes the disciplinary control of social relations under the governance of an instrumental, pragmatic logic; a logic which demands consistency and optimal efficiency in the management of industrial production and economic capital. Human experience is reduced to an automated process of repetition and duplication where possible discord between social institutions and atomised individuals is pre-empted through an internalised compulsion to conform. The abstract form of this inner compulsion is evident not only in Kant's transcendental moral law but also in his *a priori* schematic relation of empirical perception to the categories of pure understanding. Here perception is objectively pre-structured even before it occurs. Kant says in *Critique of Judgement* -

This harmony of nature with our cognitive faculty is presupposed *a priori* ... For without this presupposition we should have no order of nature in accordance with empirical laws, and consequently no guiding thread for an experience of these in all their variety.⁴¹

The modern social content of this presupposed concordance, a judgement which Fichte later develops on the basis of a self-interested intellectual intuition, is an experience determined *a priori* by the social categories that the economic and administrative system upholds in the interests of its own institutional self-preservation. Adorno refers to the entertainment industry as a primary social medium through which the internalisation of repressive social norms occurs.

Intuitively Kant foretold what Hollywood consciously put into practice: in the very process of production, images are pre-censored according to the norm of the understanding which will later govern their apprehension. Even before its occurrence, the perception which serves to confirm the

⁴⁰ T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944] tr. J. Cumming, London and New York, Verso, 1989, pp.83-84. {translation modified between brackets}

⁴¹ I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement* [1790] tr. J. Bernard, New York, Hafner Press, 1951, pp.22-23.

public judgment is adjusted by that judgment.⁴²

These repressive features of Kant's idea of freedom are again evident in the mid-nineteenth century turn to Positivism. While rejecting Kant's self-reflective, transcendental reason, the emerging human sciences nevertheless retain a modified, structuralist variety of Kant's intelligible domain. For when human activity is interpreted according to the Positivist method of classifying reactive states, that activity only acquires significance in so far as it concords with the pre-determined methodological grid through which it is interpreted. Here the critical ideas of freedom and social solidarity disappear in the subject's passive adjustment to already instituted social practices.

Under the guise of rational social planning, the pragmatic imperative of corporate self-preservation has turned against the potential reconciliation of individual and society aporetically heralded in Kant's idea of freedom. Far from actualising the social solidarity of which it gave promise, the sovereignty of the modern nation state, in conjunction with competing corporate monopolies, has resulted in nothing less than organised anarchy. The anti-authoritarian principle of enlightenment thought has been reversed in the moral compliance demanded of individuals, in the name of rational self-preservation, by modern state and corporate institutions. Not only is self-reflective reason devalued in the pragmatic imperative of economic survival, but the spontaneity of human emotions generally, and all forms of critical dissent, are dismissed as irrational. Despite priding itself on a cunning escape from all forms of mythological sacrifice, modern society nevertheless sacrifices freedom to the new mythology of instrumental, pragmatic reason and technical expertise. Freedom from the constraints of nature and its mythological demons has turned sour.

A contemporary of Kant, a disaffected member of the aristocracy, had already drawn up, albeit unintentionally, an itemised ledger of this dialectical inversion. Attempting to regain favour with his own class, the Marquis de Sade translated the bourgeois ideals of enlightenment morality into a code of practice whereby the aristocracy could reassert its otherwise declining power. In de Sade's novels the repressive, authoritarian aspect of Kant's noumenal free will is pushed to an extreme. Here, reason does not so much disclose the moral limits of free will, but becomes rather the legitimating accomplice of whatever social plans those holding power carry through.

⁴² T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* op. cit., p.84.

So long as the identity of the user of reason is disregarded, the affinity of reason is as much to force as the mediation; according to the individual or group situation, it permits peace or war, tolerance or repression. Since it exposes substantial goals as the power of nature over mind, as the erosion of its self-legislation, reason is - by virtue, too, of its very formality - at the service of any natural interest. Thinking becomes an organic medium pure and simple, and reverts to nature.⁴³

While upheld as a neutral coordinating faculty, moral reason nevertheless remains entirely subject to the particular desires of those wielding political authority. In such a context, 'domination appears as archaic terror in a fascistically rationalised form'.⁴⁴ One of de Sade's characters, Francavilla, gives forthright expression to this state of affairs when he advocates supplanting the terror laden promise of hell with the more terrifying threat of life-long penal servitude for those who disrupt the state power. Similarly, the successful colonisation of a foreign people is achieved by ensuring that the power of the oppressor becomes the sole object of worship. Furthermore the population needs to be controlled to the point of either partial extermination or forced reproduction whenever those governing the state judge such measures necessary. The wealthy will not object when it is perceived that, in effect, only the lower social classes would be forced to submit to this judicially orchestrated tyranny. The only *telos* of such totalitarian expediency, Francavilla acknowledges, is the preservation of existing authority and power. The reduction of reason to a rigid schedule of coordinated activities is clearly evident in de Sade's description of competing sexual groups who assiduously set about their orgiastic experiences leaving nothing to the felicitous tempo of mere chance. Each member of a group has a precise, pre-determined function and is replaceable by a trained reserve. The activity is conducted according to a set of arbitrarily constructed rules. As with totalitarian regimes, the purposiveness of this functional rationality veils the purposelessness of such activities, excepting of course public acclamation and self-aggrandisement.

The architectonic structure of the Kantian system, like the gymnastic pyramids of Sade's orgies ... reveals an organization of life as a whole which is deprived of any substantial goal.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.88.

The pursuit of pleasure is subordinated to the schematic discipline of rationally efficient modes of conduct, which serve merely to enhance that same rigid, disciplinary schema.

Schematising the conduct of human beings according to the pre-determined or *a priori* rationality of a universal moral law does not indicate a condition of universal freedom. On the contrary, when situated in the sensuous domain of social causality, Kant's transcendental act of moral self-reflection becomes a legitimation of political authority and repressive social norms. This is clear enough indication that the relationship between theory and moral conduct is not something that theory can wholly determine without becoming a source of unfreedom. Indeed the difference between theory and practice cannot be removed by theory for their difference is not simply theoretical. Neither is practice without theoretical mediation. Yet the moral indictment of torture and concentration camps, or any other form of discrimination, does not arise through principles made valid by the non-contradictory consistency of formalised theory. Moreover, when the affectively driven outrage at such events is transformed into an abstract moral principle, theory turns against the spontaneous response it might otherwise seek to defend.

This contradiction alone is the stage of morality today. ... The incompatibility of every general moral judgment with psychological determination - an incompatibility which nonetheless does not relieve us of the judgment that something is evil - comes from the objective antagonism, not from inconsistent thought.⁴⁶

Acquitting the Auschwitz murderers would be a grave injustice, and yet their punishment by death perpetuates the violence it is meant to eradicate. Judicial punishment is compromised by the imposition of violence; a violence which it otherwise seeks to deter. Refusal to acknowledge this contradiction in the theory of deterrence serves merely to enhance the torture and violence that society has come to expect.

Without an appeal to the need for freedom there appears no reason to criticise those who, in their own self-interest, use others solely as means. Not unless, of course, the aim of critique is simply to replace one set of power relations with another; the social implication here being that there will always be those who are free, in contrast to others who are unfree. This ontological defence of power perversely sanctions the historical necessity of suffering and discrimination. What is equally perverse, however, is an unflinching conviction in the actuality of freedom despite the ongoing perpetration of

social violence and injustice. Society here appears to consciousness either as a realm altogether separate from the self-sufficient individual, whose freedom remains untouched by social practices, or as identical with the individual in so far as freedom is effectively enabled by that society. In both cases the idea of freedom is modelled on just those apparently independent and free parties that exercise actual social dominion and who generally defend their power and freedom by recourse to the argument of natural causality. As Adorno indicates, this makes a mockery of the unfreedom still evident throughout the world. It perpetuates a belief in the actuality of freedom; a belief ideologically insulated from insight into its socially produced normativity. What is not understood in these relations of individual and society is the manner in which both poles are dialectically entwined.

Freedom and Unfreedom

When Kant lays claim to the actuality of freedom through the transcendental identity of free will and responsibility, or what amounts to the conceptual reconciliation of individual and society, he reduces freedom to an involuntary because necessary social causality. This causality, while affirming free will, equally affirms the inescapable necessity of social integration through a self-reflective concordance with social norms. Kant skirts around the negative, repressive implications of the latter with his claim that the determining ground of the moral law, or what gives it an intelligible spontaneous character, is the unconditioned noumenal aspect of free will.

For the moral law sufficiently proves its reality even for the critique of speculative reason by giving a positive definition to a causality thought merely negatively, the possibility of which was incomprehensible to speculative reason though this reason was compelled to assume it. ... we could defend the supposition of a freely acting cause when applied to a being in the world of sense only in so far as the being was regarded also as noumenon.⁴⁷

Far from resolving the contradiction between free will and the moral law, Kant's recourse to noumenal intelligibility effectively exacerbates it. For free will, when considered according to its alternate transcendental and noumenal character, is, as Adorno puts it, 'both subject and not subject to causality'.⁴⁸ Hence contrary to his express intention,

⁴⁶ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.286.

⁴⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* op. cit., pp.49-50.

⁴⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.290.

Kant's idea of freedom indicates that 'individuals are antagonistic in themselves ... that they are both free and unfree'.⁴⁹

Having defended, against Hume's scepticism, the intelligible domain of moral reason, without which our experience of the sensible world would not be possible, Kant nevertheless phenomenologically abstracts from somatic sensibility and those social practices that otherwise produce a critical claim to freedom. When freedom is said to occur within the self-reflective autarky, the pure being-in-itself of the individual personality, freedom is hypostatized in its abstract, noumenal independence from social relations generally. While Freud translates the residual animism of Kant's noumenal soul into an affectively contextualised ego-psychology, he nevertheless confines the ego, in a manner analogous to Kant, within the apparent immanence of its own libidinal, or in Kant's case, transcendental laws. For the claim to therapeutic success indicates nothing but the ability to adapt to the demands of a reality principle that has been ontologically hypostatized in the patriarchal parable of a self-preserving primal patricide. Singular resolutions of this psychic conflict, of the destructive implications of an unmitigated drive to self-preservation, would not be sufficient indication, however, of social reconciliation and freedom. Accordingly, Adorno comments -

The well-balanced person who no longer sensed the inner conflict of psychological forces, the irreconcilable claims of id and ego, would not thereby have achieved an inner resolution of social conflicts. [S/he] would be confusing [h/er] psychic state - [h/er] personal good fortune - with objective reality. H/er integration would be a false reconciliation with an unreconciled world, and would presumably amount in the last analysis to an 'identification with the aggressor', a mere character-mask of subordination.⁵⁰

Such integration, in Kant's view, would make that individual both good and free. In contrast, Adorno views such compliance as a manifestation of unfreedom.

The existential appeal to personhood, which, in the name of freedom, attempts to dispense with the conceptual *ratio* of moral universalisability and its socially integrative implications, is nevertheless also constructed, Adorno argues, around the irresistible charisma of universality. For while personalism dispenses with reason as its moral foundation, it cannot relinquish the exaltation of its own consciousness as absolute.

This is why the concept of the person as well as its variants -

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.294.

⁵⁰ T.W. Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology II' tr. I. Wohlfarth in *New Left Review* no.47 1968, p.83. {translation modified between brackets}

the 'I-thou' relation, for example - have assumed the oily tone of unbelieved theology.⁵¹

Defiantly withdrawing into its own atomistic personhood, the existential self unwittingly conforms to the socially prescribed dualism of individual and society where the determining effects of the latter appear altogether irrelevant. Here the apparent substantiality of an intrinsic self veils what is otherwise a passive, reactive response to the authority of modern social convention. While personalism attempts to maintain the value of individual dignity through an ontological claim to selfhood, such faith is highly suspect, Adorno argues, since the modern individual is not yet human, not yet free. It is for just this reason, Adorno argues, that Marx discards the notion of self-alienation in his later work. Adorno further comments that -

By the concept of the self we should properly mean their potential, and this potential stands in polemical opposition to the reality of the self. This is the main reason why the talk of 'self-alienation' is untenable.⁵²

Self-identity becomes substantial, Adorno continues, only through resistance to what is socially prescribed, that is, through resistance to positive, one-dimensional forms of existential and conceptual self-identity.

The concepts of noumenal free will and existential personhood nevertheless set out to avoid the social integration demanded by the traditional consistency of moral reason. They were attempts, albeit unsuccessful, to signal the irreducible nonidentity of individual beings within the universal systematics of moral reason. Accordingly Adorno makes the comment that in contrast to the speculative identities of reason and nature set up by Kant's Idealist successors -

What survives in Kant, in the alleged mistake of his apologia for the thing-in-itself - the mistake which the logic of consistency from Maimon on could so triumphantly demonstrate - is the memory of the element which balks at that logic : the memory of nonidentity. ... The construction of thing-in-itself and intelligible character is that of a nonidentity as the premise of possible identification; but it is also the construction of that which eludes identification.⁵³

What subverts the claim to nonidentity, however, is the abstractly proclaimed positivity of noumenal and existential being divorced from any social determinants. For the irreducible nonidentity of the subject appears only negatively over and against its socially

⁵¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.277.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.278.

determining conditions. In Adorno's words, 'it breaks through in the subject's painful perception that in their reality, in what became of them, all [people] are mutilated'.⁵⁴ What blocks the perception of this contemporary mutilation is the individual's unflinching interest in h/er own self-preservation; an interest, moreover, which is economically and socially prescribed. The result of this psychological block, Adorno contends, is an extreme egotism which gives rise to debilitating neuroses. Like the individual who has some insight into their socially determined condition, however, the truth content of Kant's intelligible character remains paralysed by its own inability to change the circumstances of its suffering. Locked in its self-preserving neuroses, the individual cannot find that aspect of its character which would indicate the possibility of being other than it is.

Translated into judgments about real people, Kantian ethics knows but one criterion: how a [person] happens to be, so is [their] unfreedom.⁵⁵

Indeed, Kant's claim to freedom, despite its so-called rational foundation, remains delusory; and this, as Hegel points out, since the individual remains inexorably tied to history's universal necessity.

Marx later interprets the historical necessity to which the modern individual is historically subject as the economic practice of commodity exchange. Here the sale of labour power for the sake of self-preservation is a function of the bourgeois class' need to ensure its own economic survival. What takes effect through this economic practice, however, is the social integration of so-called free individuals under the universal banner of commodity exchange. Social freedom is unconsciously sacrificed in the name of an individual's chosen career path and personal economic goals. The more the practice of commodity exchange thereby stifles the enlightenment promise of universal freedom, the more it depends on an ideology of competition and individual success to mask the unfreedom, the social injustices occasioned by its economic imperative. Moreover, the practice of morality is now reflected in a legally instituted system of universal rights and obligations, whose abstract legality represses the very solidarity to which they originally made claim.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292 footnote.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.297. {translation modified between brackets}

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.295. {translation modified between brackets}

Without perceiving how the modern, free individual is an historically produced social phenomenon, and not simply its own self-sufficient cause, the idea of freedom remains one-dimensional. The opposite claim to total unfreedom, however, is equally inadequate. For here there is a failure to perceive the freedom that persists in the self-conscious resistance to this economically generated mutilation of individuals and social relations generally. As Adorno puts it -

The contradiction of freedom and determinism is not, as Kant's understanding of his *Critiques* would have it, a contradiction between two theoretical positions, dogmatism and scepticism; it is a contradiction in the subjects' way to experience themselves, as now free, now unfree.⁵⁶

To insist that one must choose between believing oneself either free or unfree, Adorno argues, is indication of a consciousness unable to go beyond the socially institutionalised logic of non-contradiction.

Each drastic thesis is false. In their inmost core, the theses of determinism and of freedom coincide. Both proclaim identity. The reduction to pure spontaneity applies to the empirical subject the very same law which as an expanded causal category becomes determinism.⁵⁷

In a still unfree society freedom and determinism remain in a dialectical relation where neither the one nor the other has any claim to truth in isolation from the other.

[F]reedom ... and unfreedom are so entangled that unfreedom is not just an impediment to freedom but a premise of its concept.⁵⁸

Adorno goes on to argue that freedom and determinism could become identical only in a free society. The notion of responsibility would here become that of a 'fearless, active participation in a whole',⁵⁹ where such activity would no longer be impeded by the struggle for economic self-preservation. The individual's inner fears and guilt would dissipate only with the collapse of the bourgeois practice of commodity exchange and the false consciousness of a self-sufficient individual freedom arising therefrom. Until this time, Adorno argues -

There is no available model of freedom save one: that consciousness, as it intervenes in the total social constitution, will through that constitution intervene in the complexion of the individual. This notion is not utterly chimerical, because consciousness is a ramification of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.264.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.265.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.264.

the energy of drives; it is part impulse itself, and also a moment of that which it intervenes in.⁶⁰

This dialectic does not arise through a misconstrual of terms, Adorno contends, but is an expression of the modern tension between individual claims to freedom and social unfreedom. The only morality possible in this contradictory social context, Adorno argues, is 'to try to live so that one may believe [oneself] to have been a good animal'.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.265.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* {translation modified between brackets}

B2)

FREEDOM AND HISTORICAL REASON : HEGEL

Introduction

With Kant free will depends on the exercise of a self-reflective moral reason, the capacity for which, Kant argues, is present within all human subjects regardless of the socio-historic practices within which they are situated. What characterises this transcendental moral *ratio* is the self-reflective universalisability of otherwise personal maxims of self-conduct. In other words, the self-reflective universalisability of personal conduct forms the sole condition of possibility for the actualisation of freedom. Yet in so far as this transcendental conceptual *ratio* is manifestly the same for all human subjects, then whatever others rationally conclude to be morally legitimate action will necessarily accord with any particular subject's solitary deliberations. Not only does Kant thereby assume an unwarranted moral identity between each self-reflecting subject, but he also considers the will to freedom as an unmediated fact of self-reflective consciousness. Critical of this abstract formalism, Hegel argues that what is missing in Kant's idea of freedom is the social dimension of intersubjective recognition. For only through intersubjective relations of mutual recognition and respect does an individual's self-identity fully emerge. Hegel's phenomenological articulation of the master/slave relation shows this process of recognition to involve a dialectical dependency, which shapes the form of freedom peculiar to each.

Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or 'recognized'.¹

In his later *Philosophy of Right*, however, Hegel articulates this relation as it manifests within the specific social spheres of the family, civil society, and the nation state.² He refers to the unity of these spheres as ethical life generally. An individual's transition from family relations to those of civil society reveals a developing spirit of freedom and responsibility, which reaches its pinnacle in the constitutional sovereignty of the nation state. In contrast to Kant's self-reflective moral imperative, Hegel situates the condition

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* [1807] tr. J.B. Baillie, New York and London, Harper Torchbooks, 1967, p.229. {Hegel's inverted comas}

through this self-reflective process, Spirit is said to carry out not only the becoming of its own truth as absolute Knowledge but also the historical becoming of social freedom.

What enables Hegel to make the shift from the abstract rationality of Kant's idea of freedom to this more historically concrete articulation is his dialectical understanding of the relation between being and reason. Reason, Hegel argues, is not so much an externally applied instrument for determining objective truth and moral rightness, as had been the case since Aristotle, but emerges from the developing self-conscious relation of thought to its object. In Hegel's words -

The one and only thing for securing scientific progress ... is knowledge of the logical precept that Negation is just as much Affirmation as Negation, or that what is self-contradictory resolves itself not into nullity, into abstract Nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, that such negation is not an all-embracing Negation, but is the negation of a definite somewhat which abolishes itself, and thus is a definite negation; and that thus the result contains in essence that from which it results ... Since what results, the negation, is a definite negation, it has a content. It is a new concept, but a higher, richer concept than that which preceded; for it has been enriched by the negation or opposite of that preceding concept, and thus contains it but contains also more than it, and is the unity of it and its opposite.⁵

This dialectical rhythm of rational becoming forms the essential content of Spirit's history. Reason is no longer simply an epistemological or moral tool but is, more precisely, Spirit's infinite history of becoming. In the opening chapters of *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel demonstrates this same dialectical development within the self-reflective experience of finite, individual subjects. This occurs through a consideration of those previously unchallenged presuppositions that form the foundation of a subject's claim to truth. Situating itself within these presuppositions as their very reasoned negation, the self-reflecting subject comes to discern the contradictory implications of these earlier, unreflected presuppositions. On the basis of this self-contradictory experience the subject develops a more reasoned claim to truth. Knowledge thus presents itself as the rationally necessary development of self-consciousness. The culmination of this development is reached, Hegel argues, once the subject comes to understand its historical determination by the universal truth of the world Spirit. As the historical unity of the finite subject and its self-reflected other, Spirit is said to be that

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* 2 vols. [1817] tr. W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers, London, Allen and Unwin, 1952, vol.1, pp.64-65.

which is always already present in our coming to be and passing away. For what becomes historically actual is nothing less than Spirit's self-reflective becoming.

Hegel thereby interprets the course of world history as the external manifestation of Spirit's self-reflective, dialectical becoming. The decisive stages of historical development from Oriental to ancient Greek, to Roman-Christian and thence to modern Germanic civilisations, Hegel contends, are those which Spirit has actualised in becoming conscious of itself as the self-determining Idea of world history. Corresponding to these major phases of Spirit's historical trajectory, the various forms of political statehood, their social institutions and the individuals of which they are composed, have all been shaped by a particular determining principle, an intuitive, natural, religious, and now rational principle respectively. Deciphering these principles as constitutive of its own self-conscious teleology, as historical products of its own self-reflective development, Spirit becomes conscious of itself as a freely determining, historically immanent absolute. Having resolved the antithetical relation of finite consciousness to the previous religious principle of a universal God, Spirit now makes a rationally necessary claim to social freedom. Moreover, Spirit's historical development is viewed as an entirely natural process of growth.

The World Spirit and Social Labour

Hegel developed the idea of a world Spirit from the notions of universal history and human progress evident in Kant's article, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*.⁶ Like Kant, freedom can be achieved only through self-conscious and so rational, historical progress. Yet contrary to Kant, Hegel -

does not oppose [freedom] to empirical life as an abstract principle, a self-sufficient idea, but instead links it through its own content to the production of a true totality - to precisely what appears under the name of humanity in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Hegel thereby transcends the bourgeois separation of ethos, as something that although unconditionally binding is valid only for the subject, from the objectivity of society, which is ostensibly merely empirical.⁷

Through the historical dialectic of Spirit, which is at once the mediation of subjective consciousness by objective social relations, Hegel demonstrates the historically rational

⁶ I. Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' [1784] in *Kant's Political Writings* tr. H. Nisbet, ed. H. Reiss, Cambridge, CUP, 1970.

measure of morality socially embedded in self-reflecting individuals. Social relations here acquire the positive *ethos* of what is good and right by virtue of the constitutionally self-legitimizing statutes of state power and social convention. However, just as Kant's rational, cosmopolitan idea of human progress glosses over the particularity of individual experience, so too Hegel's historical world Spirit ultimately rides roughshod over that same individual particularity. In so doing the world Spirit contravenes its own intention and falls foul of a critique that Hegel had already levelled at Kant; notably, the disappearance of individuality within the abstract universality of Kant's moral law. With the world Spirit's democratically enlightened demand for universal equality as a constitutionally secured principle within state laws, there is a concomitant disregard for the qualitative differences in individual circumstance. Abstracting from the specificities of individual circumstance, statutory law becomes a principle of inequality and violence. Hence, while sustaining a political order through which society ensures its own as well as its individual members' self-preservation, the laws of a sovereign nation state may just as easily generate a reign of social terror. As demonstrated in recent Chinese, Yugoslavian, Indonesian and Russian history, this is a terror which the national state has no hesitation in exercising against those of its citizens who dare challenge its legality. Adorno outlines this *aporia* in the concept of law when he states -

Law is the primal phenomenon of irrational authority. In law the formal principle of equivalence becomes the norm; everyone is treated alike. An equality in which differences perish secretly serves to promote inequality; it becomes the myth that survives amidst an only seemingly demythologized [humanity].⁸

For Hegel those inequalities apparent in early modern civil society remain altogether subject to the universalising definitions of acceptable social practice stipulated in state laws. While these laws remain the ineluctable basis of intersubjective recognition, what they reveal more precisely is the instrumental power of the state over its citizens. Hegel, however, turns a blind eye to those new forms of unfreedom and inequality made legitimate through state laws. In proclaiming the modern historical reconciliation of individual and state in the constitutional monarchy of Prussia, in defending the actuality of social freedom, Hegel's world Spirit reveals its profoundly ideological character.

⁷ T.W. Adorno, *Hegel : Three Studies* [1963] tr. S.W. Nicholzen, Cambridge and London, MIT, 1993, p.48. {translation modified between brackets}

⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1966] tr. E.B. Ashton, New York, Continuum, 1990, p.309. {translation modified between brackets}

What nevertheless remains true in Hegel's concept of Spirit, Adorno contends, is its inadvertent expression of 'the social nature of labour'.⁹ Labour, as Marx later pointed out, was that activity through which all spheres of human life in modern capitalist society became socially commensurable. While Hegel does not explicitly indicate this social implication in Spirit's universality, his language betrays it when referring to Spirit's mediating role in history as the systematic labour or pure activity of Spirit. The socially transforming act of labour is nothing short of the internal, self-reflective work of Spirit. The social relations of labour constitute the functional context of what Adorno more generally refers to as society. Society's determining relation to the subjects who populate it is effectively no different, Adorno contends, from Hegel's understanding of their relation to the world Spirit, to that historical essence which moulds their personal and intersubjective experiences. It is not enough, however, to substitute society for Spirit as a way of demystifying Hegel's conceptual *ratio*. For, as Adorno points out -

Society is essentially concept, just as spirit is. ... The principle of the equivalence of social labour makes society in its modern bourgeois sense both something abstract and the most real thing of all, just what Hegel says of the emphatic notion of the concept.¹⁰

In other words, when the concept of society, the totality of physical and intellectual labour, or in Hegel's case, the world Spirit, is hypostatized as an independent entity beyond the social environment of human activity, this concept becomes ideological dogma.¹¹ The concept of society can avoid this charge of ideological abstraction only through explicating its specific historical relations of production; that is to say, in the modern context, through the historical relations of labour and capital. Similarly the concept of nature, if it is not to remain an ideologically hypostatized entity, needs to be understood in terms of the modern, historical relations of production, that is, through its mediation by social labour. When Hegel's concept of Spirit demands *a priori* affirmation as an historically rational condition of possibility for the actualisation of freedom, when it sets itself apart as an entity independent of the socio-historic limits of human labour, it clearly manifests this hypostatized, abstract character. Hegel's dialectic of Spirit thereby ironically restores the unquestioned positivity of a solitary, self-reflective subject: a positivity, which he had previously admonished with respect to the philosophies of Kant

⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Hegel : Three Studies op. cit.*, p.18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.20.

and Fichte.¹² When set apart from any form of social mediation, Hegel's concept of Spirit reveals nothing but a fetish for the transcendental absoluteness of its claim to social freedom. In light of these Idealist shortcomings, the necessary *telos* of progress driving Spirit's historical labour can be seen as an ideological defence of the compulsory work ethic, or as Adorno puts it, a 'bourgeois celebration of labour'.¹³

When a nation state's right to human labour becomes a social absolute, however, its universal legality, underwritten by state laws, becomes a negatively determining force within Spirit's drive to social freedom. In effect, Hegel's reconciliation of the individual with society cannot be made good in light of the entirely self-sufficient legality, the being-in and for-itself of the nation state, since the state thereby coercively integrates its subjects through its legal right to economically productive labour. What the principle of national sovereignty thus reveals is a society whose insatiable drive for economic growth and productivity shows scant regard for the physical and emotional suffering of individuals bound to the sale of their labour-time for the sake of the nation's economic and political well-being. Hegel's claim to reconciliation, as Adorno indicates, thereby 'derives from unreconcilable violence'.¹⁴ What is given mute expression in this flawed reconciliation, what can be read on the silent lips of individuals suffering under the terror of compulsive economic efficiencies, is more precisely the ongoing history of an antagonistic social totality. What Hegel considered the historic actuality of social freedom, made possible through the nation state's rational, instrumental organisation of social labour, is more precisely a condition of social unfreedom.

The Nation State and Individual Autonomy

Hegel maintained that the contemporary social embodiment of the world Spirit, at its highest level, was the constitutional monarchy of Prussia; and this, since Prussia then constituted, in Hegel's view, the highest expression of social freedom. Hegel further speculated that the United States of America would later become the leading incarnation of the world Spirit. As the concrete manifestation of social freedom, the modern nation

¹¹ Marx's argument against the hypostatisation of labour may be found in his 'Critique of the Gotha Program' [1875] in *The Marx-Engels Reader* ed. R.C. Tucker, New York and London, Norton, 1978.

¹² For Hegel's critique see his *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* [1802] tr. H.Harris and W. Cerf, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1977.

¹³ T.W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* op. cit., p.25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27.

state is viewed equally as the political embodiment of a unified, popular national spirit. Moreover, this national spirit, Hegel continues, is the necessary ground of the nation state's political legitimacy. The state's lawful governance of the family and civil society has its foundation in this unified national spirit. The national spirit is embodied not only in the constitution of the sovereign nation state, however, but also in the individual head of state who represents that state's individual, political sovereignty. Hegel considered Napoleon to be the incarnation not only of the French national spirit, but also, through his unintended export of this spirit to the rest of Europe, of the world Spirit. Indeed our contemporary sense of personal autonomy, Hegel argues, derives directly from Spirit's historical embodiment in the modern, sovereign nation state.

How then does Hegel conceive the relation of the sovereign nation state, as the manifestation of social freedom, to those individuals who form its populace? How do individuals demonstrate this autonomy in the modern political context of the sovereign nation state? This is Hegel's response.

The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal: they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interests and through the co-operation of particular knowing and willing; and individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in the light of the universal, and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end.¹⁵

In other words, while individual activities are directed towards achieving personal goals, individuals are at once willing, co-operative agents in the maintenance of the nation state and its spirit of individual sovereignty. Yet the nation state simultaneously undermines the sovereignty of its individual agents, since they, as Hegel further argues, are no more than negatively mediated instances, the historically determined agents of the sovereign nation state.

In contrast with the spheres of private rights and private welfare (the family and civil society), the state is from one point of view an external

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* op. cit., §260, pp.160-161.

necessity and their higher authority; its nature is such that their laws and interests are subordinate to it and dependent on it.¹⁶

This hypostatisation of the nation state is again evident when Hegel argues against considering its constitution as an historically conditioned social contract produced through human action, and insists on it being viewed as in some sense divine and constant, 'above the sphere of things that are made'.¹⁷ Against Rousseau, and in keeping with Montesquieu, Hegel here clearly undermines the sovereignty of individual subjects within the nation state. As the manifestation of social freedom, the nation state effectively incorporates its subjects as necessary, albeit unknowing servants in its economic and political maintenance. The unified spirit of national sovereignty is thus nothing but an ideological spell, a false consciousness of social freedom, which permeates the spheres of family and civil society alike.

What further attests to the ideological function of individual sovereignty, as Marx had indicated, is the manner in which human lives are systematically integrated, to the point of dissolution, as abstract units of labour time in an economic system of exchange demanding total compliance.¹⁸ Individuality is effectively disabled in the self-preserving need to comply with the universal demands of the bourgeois labour market, politically underwritten by the laws of the modern nation state. The popular national spirit blinds those under its sway to the manner in which they collectively partake in a specifically bourgeois system of social labour, and which subjugates them irrespectively to its own particular ends, namely the nation state's economic and political self-preservation. This is the illusory, universal magic of national spirit, which upholds the value of individual sovereignty only to repress it all the more effectively in its hapless agents.

This much of Hegel's insistence on the universality of the particular is true: in its perversion, as impotent individualization at the universal's mercy, the particular is dictated by the principle of perverted universality.¹⁹

The spell of individual sovereignty masks the antagonism of the nation state towards its subjects. In so doing, this ideological magic helps secure the state against the ever-threatening possibility of its economic and political demise. Confronted with an increasingly overbearing process of social normalisation, Freud noted the development of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §261, p.161.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §273n, p.178.

¹⁸ K. Marx, *Capital* vol.1, tr. B. Fowkes, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976, pp.128-130.

¹⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.344.

an aggressive, self-destructive drive in the individual psyche.²⁰ The economic and political demands of the bourgeois nation state produces within its populace a thinly veiled destructive coldness more popularly referred to as *angst*. Caught within this social straightjacket individuals become increasingly affected by a disquieting sense of social impotence and seek refuge in their own inner psychology. Society, in Adorno's words -

perpetuates the spell as coldness between [individuals], without which the calamity could not recur. ... *Angst* is the necessary form of the curse laid in the universal coldness upon those who suffer ... it.²¹

Beneath the ideological veneer of positive good cheer, of a unified national spirit, this coldness pervades the competitive economic and social relations of the modern nation state.

Despite these critical insights, contemporary social relations will nevertheless remain inextricably caught, it would seem, in the universal web of bourgeois commodity production and exchange, and will succumb to the ideological spell of individuality cast by the spirit of national sovereignty. This spell is reinforced through social practices that encourage subjects to submit to the fateful stroke of economic chance. They increasingly turn to speculative financial trading, casino style gambling, lotteries and prize competitions as ways of potentially denying their social impotence, or what is a substantial lack of individuality. Attempting to establish individuality through these fateful economic contingencies, however, is to fall even further under the crippling effects of this modern, universal magic. Indeed, contrary to their apparent individuality, subjects of the modern nation state manifest a decisive sameness in their private concerns and practices. Despite the promise of individuality, the modern nation state remains governed by an economic reality principle that stifles it. Hegel's privileging of necessity over chance, when explicating the historical development of the modern nation state, effectively masks the extent to which this community is subject to the spell of individuality and the anarchic flux of economic chance. As Adorno points out -

Running its course in the realm of necessity, the fate of [people] is blind to them, 'over their heads', contingent. The strictly deterministic character of the economic laws of social motion is just what condemns

²⁰ S. Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* [1929] tr. J. Riviere and 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' [1920] tr. C. Hubback in *Great Books of the Western World* 54 vols., ed. R.M. Hutchins, Chicago, London, Toronto and Geneva, Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.54, 1952, pp.767-806 and pp.639-663.

²¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.347. {translation modified between brackets - Adorno's italics}

When defending itself against these charges in the name of a multicultural pluralism, the modern nation state nevertheless persists in disguising the social obliteration of individuality through the ideology of a now culturally diverse, but still essentially unified national spirit.

The mesmerising spell of national spirit had also been at work in Kant's doctrine of noumenal freedom. The force of this bourgeois magic is evident in the naturalistic claim to a self-preserving sovereignty, where the actuality of freedom is thus said to be beyond question. Yet when conceptual reflection does not venture outside the hypnotic circle of its universal claims, except to model itself after the apparent immediacy or natural being of individual subjects, the claim to freedom is nothing but gratuitous assertion. In thrall to the plain factuality of nature, such thinking reveals a dehistoricised condition of social reification. When Hegel characterises the world Spirit as having the naturalistic immediacy of a living individual, an ambiguity emerges between this naturalistic claim to individual freedom and Spirit's otherwise historically mediated path to freedom. In other words, Hegel's attempt to resolve the Kantian aporia of transcendental and noumenal freedom through the dialectical rationality of absolute Knowledge again reproduces that aporia, albeit now in the form of Spirit's historically mediated, yet immediate natural freedom. In effect, this naturalistic claim signals 'the emergence of the spell [of individuality] as the metaphysic governing reality'.²⁵

Historical Experience and Trends

Common sense thinking flatly dismisses any claim to a supra-sensible reality extending beyond the everyday interactions of people with each other. Such claims are viewed as senseless speculations since they have no foundation in empirically observable facts. Acknowledging the determining reality of an historical trend beyond the experience of 'plain facts' would, Adorno argues, put at risk the common sense illusion of individual autonomy. As Adorno further argues, such acknowledgment would -

undermine their belief in facticity itself; it would have to make them go so far beyond the facts that the facts would lose their unreflected primacy over the universals which triumphant nominalism holds for nothing, for a subtractable adjunct tacked on by the classifying scientist.²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.349.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p301.

Indeed the supposed psychological dangers, faced by a consciousness which entertains speculations regarding socio-historic trends and their permeation of individual behaviour, are sufficient to keep the general faith in common sense immediacy intact. For common sense thinking, speculative historical claims, especially those emanating from the philosophies of Hegel and Marx, serve no earthly purpose in the pressing, pragmatic concerns of everyday economic and psychological self-preservation.

That the significance of isolated facts identified by empirical consciousness depends on social circumstances not immediately at hand, can, however, hardly be disputed. An activist's arrest, for example, is not simply due to an immediate decision by those enforcing the law, but depends on a series of anterior political events whose detailed historiography will reveal a trend towards some specific social conflict. Similarly with regard to the historical event known as the French Revolution, there were conditioning circumstances not immediately evident in that event which substantially shaped its final outcome.

[T]he key positions of economic production had ... been already occupied by the bourgeoisie. ... [T]he acute absolutist mismanagement and the financial crisis on which the physiocratic reformers foundered under Louis XVI [and] the specific privations of the masses of Paris.²⁷

The historical trend towards bourgeois revolution becomes apparent once these circumstances are causally related to what otherwise appears merely as an insignificant storming of the Bastille by a group of politically disaffected radicals. While common sense acknowledges causal historical relations, these relations, and the trend they indicate, nevertheless remain external to the resulting event. In other words, for common sense, an historical trend may be identified only after the event, and will thereby only ever reveal an historical linearity in the development of that trend. What is passed over or neglected in the empirical, common sense perspective, however, is the causal immanence of an historical trend within particular, isolated events such that future historical directions become distinctly discernible. That is to say, it is possible to read an historical trend within particular events as they occur. Adorno puts it this way -

The trend can never do without the facts, but ultimately such preponderance of it within the facts makes the old-fashioned line between cause and occasion look silly. The whole distinction, not just the occasion, is external because the concrete cause lies

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.301-302. {translation modified between brackets}

in the occasion.²⁸

Facts or events, however, do not simply mirror or positively confirm the historical trend immanent within them. For example, the all but unanimous signing of a nuclear test ban treaty by the United Nations in 1996 apparently counters the global trend towards the production of nuclear power. Yet the historical trend towards the increasing use of nuclear power, with its devastating implications for the global environment, continues unabated and is causally implicit within that treaty. Similarly, the Kyoto treaty signed in that same year by most of the major industrial nations, concerning the scaling down of greenhouse gas emissions, points rather to the ever growing trend of environmental degradation occasioned by industrial pollution. Adorno also points to the emphasis placed on family unity in refugee camps during the Second World War. Causally implicit within this fact, however, is the historical trend towards the disintegration of traditional family relations. In face of this negative, counter-intuitive relation between specific events and historical trends, the common sense perspective fails to demonstrate sufficient explanatory power. For this reason facts are in need of the critical mediation of speculative historical reflection if they are not to become altogether misleading. Accordingly, it is Adorno's contention that 'insight into the essence veiled by the facticity it qualifies, has come to be impossible save as philosophy'.²⁹ Discriminating judgements as to the increasing or declining strength of an historical trend depends on the reciprocal mediation of the philosophically speculative and common sense perspectives.

This negative dialectical mediation of historical fact and trend is similarly evident in the relation between the modern nation state and individual experience. While Hegel proclaims the actualisation of social freedom in the collective individuality of the nation state, he at once fails to elucidate the destructive implications for individual experience in the state's drive to economic and political self-preservation. A psychological analysis of individual experience within the nation state, Adorno argues, would demonstrate this effect.³⁰ Similarly to Kant, however, Hegel denounced psychology as nothing but the disclosure of the accidental traits of personality, which have no relation to the historically rational form of national statehood. These denials of the relevance of psychological

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.302.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.303.

³⁰ Adorno undertook such a study in his co-authored text *The Authoritarian Personality* [1950] New York and London, Norton, 1993. Wilhelm Reich also carried through a similar project in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* [1946] tr. V. Carfagno, New York, Pocket Books, 1976.

investigation were made, however, almost a century before Freud's revelation of unconscious blocks in the individual capacity for sensuous gratification, which, he argued, result from a necessary compliance with the norms of social convention. Hence far from defending the unwavering stability of individual self-identity through membership of a social collective, Freud demonstrates the fragility of an ego which denies its drive to sensuous pleasure and happiness for the sake of its self-preservation within the socio-economic life and conventions of that collective. In this socially repressive context, an individual claim to happiness and freedom is nothing but the reified reflection of a national spirit, which, through ideological means, demands this of its subjects. Only once happiness and freedom had become actual for all humanity, Adorno argues, could this individual claim be upheld. Adorno underscores this point by suggesting that if suddenly situated in a society effectively shaped by social solidarity and universal happiness, we would find it extremely difficult to make the necessary psychological adjustments away from our primarily individualistic concerns.

Happiness would be nothing short of deliverance from particularity
as a general principle irreconcilable with individual human happiness
here and now.³¹

Hegel also indicated the insufficiency of a purely personal happiness, albeit in a manner that regressively supplants happiness with a satisfaction achieved through great deeds. The question remains, however, as to whether the historical trend to social freedom identified by Hegel is confirmed or otherwise, in view of what Freud later revealed as a general *angst* peculiar to the modern experience of individuality.³²

Certainly Hegel's intention had been to explicate the dialectic of the particular and the universal, of the individual and society, in order to defend the modern claim to freedom. However his still Idealist supposition, that the difference between individual and society is determined by the rational self-consciousness of a world Spirit, prevents him from doing so. For, as Adorno points out, Hegel's idea of a universally determining Spirit means that he is unable to show how individual experience itself mediates or determines this universal world Spirit.

If Hegel had carried the doctrine of the identity of universal and
particular further, to a dialectic in the particular itself, the particular

³¹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.353.

³² S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* [1915-17] tr. J. Strachey, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, pp.113-144.

... would have been granted the same right as the universal.³³

In smothering particular socio-historic experience under the pre-determining universality of this rational world Spirit, the latter assumes a position external to or independent of individual experience. Far from being the historical relation of individual and society, as Hegel often infers, the world Spirit takes on a life of its own in its naturalised, individual particularity; a particularity, however, which remains bloated in its alleged universality. In constituting the historical possibility of truth and freedom through this perverted universal, Hegel's philosophy of Spirit reveals an affinity with Plato's theory of Forms. While Hegel sought to give expression to the particularity of individual experience, evident in his critique of Kant's abstract formalism, his conceptually orchestrated identity of individual and national spirits, through the artifice of a world Spirit, effectively runs counter to this intention.

Critical of Hegel's claim to the actuality of freedom, Marx points to the social discontinuities arising through class struggle - the historical discords which the ideology of a unified popular spirit conveniently conceals. Freud, for his part, indicated the increasingly fragmented, neurotic character of individual experience when faced with the modern demands of social normativity. Indeed the trend emerging through this modern history of organised domination and suffering does not so much lead from 'savagery to humanitarianism, but [rather] ... from the slingshot to the megaton bomb'.³⁴ The discontinuous particularities of human history now intersect with the continuity of what is, in effect, a universal history of horror. The world Spirit does not so much reveal a rational trajectory in the positive resolution of contradictory discontinuities, but rather, as Adorno notes, 'would have to be defined as permanent catastrophe'.³⁵ Only in so far as Hegel's idea of Spirit remains a principle of absolute negativity, critically opposed to modern world history, would it deliver the truth on which it stakes its survival; namely the social unfreedom perpetrated by sovereign nation states and the bourgeois practice of commodity production.

Hegel's dialectic of history as the rational becoming of a world Spirit nevertheless constitutes a strengthening of the modern trend, initiated by Kant, to understand human existence no longer in terms of formal logic and geometric space but rather through the

³³ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.330.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.320. {translation modified between brackets}

³⁵ *Ibid.*

temporal, historical aspects of that existence. Indeed the structural relations of pure logic, Adorno argues, are the statically compressed relations of a temporal dynamic. While opening up this temporal perspective, Kant's noumenal subject nevertheless remains in an *a priori* temporal vacuum since it is not yet conscious of itself as an historically situated being. Similarly, Hegel's world Spirit, while reflecting on its historical constitution, aporetically takes on the character of a purely self-referring teleological absolute. Time thus becomes an invariant, ontological structure of Spirit's being. As Adorno points out, however, just as the concept of time needs referring to some concrete temporal experience if it is to be conceived at all, so too an event without historical reference requires just this if it is to be objectively represented. Hegel cuts off this temporal dialectics in the supra-historical *telos* of Spirit.

Natural History and Second Nature

Not only does Hegel's world Spirit assume the naturalistic form of pre-eminent individuals and nation states, but history, as the self-reflected other of this world Spirit, is made commensurable with a process of natural growth. Hegel states -

History is mind clothing itself with the form of events or the immediate actuality of nature. The stages of its development are therefore presented as immediate natural principles.³⁶

What, in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, had been developed as dialectical laws of self-reflection, namely, identity, difference, antithesis, and resolved contradiction, are now, in the *Philosophy of Right*, presented as natural principles governing the historical development of Oriental, ancient Greek, Roman, and modern Germanic civilisations respectively.³⁷ The self-reflective, dialectical development of Spirit is thus interpreted as the historically progressive unfolding of these natural principles or laws. Spirit thereby takes on the attributes of a 'second nature',³⁸ such that its then contemporary manifestation in the constitutional monarchy of Prussia appears as an entirely natural condition. This self-reflected identity of history and nature in the world Spirit, and what is just as much the aporetic identity of necessity and chance, is nothing short, Adorno argues, of an ontological valorisation of fate. Upholding the Heraclitean dialectic of

³⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* op. cit., §346, p.217.

³⁷ Cf. Hegel's remarks in the chapter entitled 'Reflection-determinations' in the Book of Essence of the Objective Logic in his *Science of Logic* op. cit. with §353 of his *Philosophy of Right* op. cit.

³⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* op. cit., §4 p.20.

becoming, Hegel's idea of natural history presents the spiralling rise and fall of world historical civilisations as an ontological constant. Hegel's historical ontology is thus another version of already numerous mythologies of fate, which promise an unending cycle of betrayal and reparation. With Hegel, Adorno argues, history thereby resembles 'a bad infinity of guilt and atonement'.³⁹

Hegel maintains that Spirit's self-reflective mediation of historical progress would entail a deliverance from the blind fatality of nature, yet he nevertheless proceeds to interpret history according to this same unconscionable process. Moreover, despite Spirit's self-reflective, historical transfiguration of the natural world, Spirit is finally construed as an individual subjective immediacy, as that which quivers with the unmediated spontaneity of first nature. For these reasons, Adorno argues that -

Quite unmetaphorically [Hegel] can be charged with mythologizing history. ... Looking into the abyss, Hegel perceived the world-historic derring-do as a second nature; but what he glorified in it, in villainous complicity, was the first nature.⁴⁰

What has been historically produced, the constitution of the nation state, now reverts to the unhistorical immediacy of first nature. Confronted with this collapse of historical relations within the concept of first nature, or what amounts to an ontological identity of history and nature, Adorno argues that Hegel's -

world spirit is the ideology of natural history. He calls it world spirit because of its power. Domination is absolutized and projected on Being itself, which is said to be the spirit. But history, the explication of something it is supposed to have always been, acquires the quality of the unhistoric.⁴¹

This is the naturalistic spell, Adorno contends, which Hegel's idea of Spirit casts over history and its otherwise specifically social character. Indeed when socio-historic conditions are postulated as altogether natural, the mythological portent of Hegel's philosophy of history becomes most evident.

Marx too had argued that the mask of nature donned by Hegel's otherwise historical world Spirit constitutes an ideological support for the naturalistic claims of bourgeois capital over social labour. When the historically developed relations of capital and labour come to be regarded as an altogether natural phenomenon, the ever-encroaching process of universal social integration under the capitalist law of exchange

³⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.339.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.357.

takes on the appearance of an entirely natural condition. The historical specificity of capitalist commodity exchange and its instrumental rationality now acquires the mythological quality of an altogether natural force. In this context, Adorno notes, 'nature turns into an irresistible parable of imprisonment'.⁴² The more enduring and successful this naturalistic illusion, which Hegel ultimately defends, the greater is the suppression of freedom and the modern destruction of nature generally. Hegel's mythology of a natural, historical Spirit ideologically impairs the possibility of social freedom.

This ontological identity of nature and history is again evident in Heidegger's existential phenomenology of being and time. While Heidegger is rightly critical of the historical ontology characteristic of Hegel's metaphysical, self-conscious world Spirit, he nevertheless invests the resistance of ontic existence to conceptual determination with the historicity of an ontologically absolute Being. In other words, despite the shift from Hegel's phenomenological dialectics of consciousness to an anti-dialectical phenomenology of temporal being, the social dynamics of historical change are again ontologically cashiered, albeit now through what Heidegger refers to as the immanent poetics of Being's absolute historicity. As with Hegel, Adorno argues, there is a certain tautological procedure at work here; for what is to be explained, namely the temporality of *Dasein*, is already constituted by the historicity of Being through which the explanation then proceeds.⁴³ Unlike Hegel, however, Heidegger remains unable to elucidate how the ontological constitution of *Dasein* actually occurs; and this, since, without demeaning its project, Heidegger's ontology cannot acknowledge that it too sets out from a subjectively presupposed identity of nature and history. In view of this otherwise ontologically assumed identity, Heidegger's idea of natural history remains trapped in the stasis of Being's abstract historicity. Through its principle historical categories of 'project' and 'being-in-the-world' Heidegger's neo-ontology remains unable to explicate any concrete historical event despite acknowledging that such contingencies indeed influence *Dasein*'s horizon of historical possibilities. This, Adorno argues, is nothing short of an 'admission that the attempt to master the empirical has misfired'.⁴⁴

The unhistoric concept of history, harbored by a falsely resurrected metaphysics in what it calls historicity, would serve to demonstrate

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.356-357.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.358.

⁴³ T.W. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History' [1932] tr. R. Hullot-Kentor in *Telos* no.60, 1984, p.116.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

the agreement of ontological thought with the naturalistic thought from which the ontological one so eagerly delimits itself. When history becomes the basic ontological structure of things in being, if not indeed the *qualitas occulta* of being itself, it is mutation as immutability, copied from the religion of inescapable nature. This allows us to transpose historic specifics into invariance at will, and to wrap a philosophical cloak around the vulgar view in which historic situations seem as natural in modern times as they once seemed divinely willed.⁴⁵

Despite his anti-Hegelian attempt to reconstitute the meaning of natural history, Heidegger's ontologically grounded phenomenology of temporal being effectively reinforces the mythological implications of Hegel's idea of natural history. Both these ontological readings of history, the one couched in the conceptual *ratio* of immanent, *a priori* dialectical laws and the other in an existential *poiesis* of temporal, phenomenological absolutes, fail to come to terms with historical specificity. In both instances the idea of natural history mythologises history in invariant structures of Being.

Adorno had first critically responded to these ontologically formulated ideas of natural history by way of reference to Lukács and Benjamin. The early Lukács interprets Hegel's notion of second nature as social convention. Lukács further argues that social conventions are such precisely because their historical meaning has been lost or forgotten. Second nature, Lukács states, 'is a petrified estranged complex of meaning that is no longer able to awaken inwardness; it is a charnel-house of rotted interiorities'.⁴⁶ What had once been innovative social relations, enlivened by a progressive historical spirit, become conventional or second nature in the passing away of that spirit. Recovering the lost meaning of conventional social relations, he continues, would entail the revelation of what once formed their immanent historical spirit. Lukács then attempts to revive the lost historical interior of these 'petrified' social relations through the metaphysical invocation of their immanent historical *telos*. In so doing, however, he again, like Hegel, produces an ontologically valorised identity of nature and history. Forty years later in a new preface to *The Theory of the Novel* Lukács is highly critical of just this neo-Hegelian schematism evident in his text.⁴⁷ The ontological synthesis of nature and history, he now argues, constitutes a neglect of historical discontinuity, and so gives a

⁴⁵ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.358. {Adorno's italics}

⁴⁶ G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* [1920] tr. A. Bostock, Cambridge, MIT, 1968, p.64, cited by Adorno in 'The Idea of Natural History' op. cit., p.118. I have retained Hullot-Kentor's translation.

⁴⁷ G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* op. cit., p.12.

false naturalistic impression to what is, in effect, nothing but an idealised account of history.

Whereas Lukács rightly indicates how once historically significant practices take on the character of social convention, and so form, as it were, a second nature, Benjamin shows how nature's transience becomes a way of reading history. As Adorno puts it -

The deepest point where history and nature converge lies precisely in this element of transience. If Lukács demonstrates the retransformation of the historical, as that which has been, into nature, then here is the other side of the phenomenon: nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history.⁴⁸

Adorno cites two passages from Benjamin that illustrate the specifically allegorical character of this manner of reading or deciphering history through nature's passing.

When, as is the case in the German play of lamentation, history comes onto the scene, it does so as a cipher to be read. 'History' is writ across the countenance of nature in the sign language of transience. ... In nature the allegorical poets saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of these generations recognize history.⁴⁹

History is congealed in ruins and natural decay. Nature presents what Benjamin refers to as a *facies hippocratica*, a withered countenance, an enigmatic sign of history in nature demanding interpretation. This baroque, allegorical aesthetic thus runs counter to the later classical aesthetic of beauty and its promise of eternal life. 'Allegory', as Benjamin puts it, 'thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty'.⁵⁰ The allegorical interpretation of 'irresistible decay' is mourning over nature's loss. Allegory is the remembrance of nature in its passing. Only in this way, Adorno argues, does it become possible 'to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or ... to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature'.⁵¹ Contrary to Lukács' historically distorting attempt to bridge the infinite distance between history and second nature through an ontological absolute, Benjamin now presents this relation as one of infinite proximity, where history may be deciphered in the decaying physiognomy of social artefacts. Under these

⁴⁸ T.W. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History' in *op. cit.*, p.119.

⁴⁹ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928] tr. J. Osborne, London and New York, Verso, 1996, p.177 and p.179. These passages are cited in reverse order by Adorno in both 'The Idea of Natural-History' *op. cit.*, p.119 and *Negative Dialectics* *op. cit.*, p.359. I have retained Hullot-Kentor's translation in both instances.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.178.

conditions historical meaning is no longer bound to an historical ontology of either self-conscious or existential phenomena. Meaning is no longer an ontological duplicate or metaphysical template of already existing empirical and temporal phenomena. Rather the allegorical interpretation of history occurs in the form of a fragmented constellation of ideas whose self-reflected, rhetorically organised mediations illuminate the historical specificity of social artefacts.⁵²

This is the transmutation of metaphysics into history ... No recollection of transcendence is possible any more, save by way of perdition; eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted through the most perishable.⁵³

Despite reverberations here of Adorno's critical, utopian metaphysics, one 'diffracted' through the modern loss of nature, Adorno had nevertheless been critical, at least implicitly, of Benjamin's failure to explicate this critical, utopian dimension in the idea of natural history. For it is not enough to say that nature, through its transience, holds history within it. This is easily misconstrued, Adorno argues, as an indeterminate merger of nature and history. Against Benjamin, Adorno reiterates Hegel's critique of Schelling, where the infinite proximity of nature and history resembles 'the night of indifferentiation in which all cats are grey'.⁵⁴ To deflect such criticism, Benjamin would firstly need to explicate the negatively determining mediation of what is newly becoming by its becoming second nature, that is, by history's transfiguration into myth. In other words, Benjamin would need to show how history is equally mediated by that mythical semblance of nature which is social convention, and which, while illusory, is yet the most real condition of all. Secondly, however, he would need to show that this negative dialectic of nature and history, here developed through a consideration of his own and Lukács' positions, at once implies the critically utopian promise of a non-illusory social reconciliation with nature.⁵⁵

⁵¹ T.W. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History' in *op. cit.*, p.117. {Adorno's italics} This passage is again evident in Adorno's much later *Negative Dialectics* *op. cit.*, p. 359. Once again I have retained Hullot-Kentor's translation.

⁵² A fuller discussion of Adorno's notion of conceptual constellations, a notion largely developed through conversations with Benjamin, occurs in my discussion of Nietzsche and perspectival knowledge (C1) and again with respect to Hegel and mimesis in the section concerning the conceptual *ratio* and sensuous particularity in part E.

⁵³ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* *op. cit.*, p.360.

⁵⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* *op. cit.*, p.79, cited by Adorno in 'The Idea of Natural History' *op. cit.*, p.122. I have retained Hullot-Kentor's translation.

⁵⁵ A fuller discussion of Adorno's utopian metaphysics and its critical social and aesthetic implications may be found in part E.

Without stipulating its utopian implications, the later Marx details what amounts to a negative dialectical analysis of nature and history in his critique of commodity fetishism. This fetish becomes evident in so far as the exchange value of commodities derives solely and directly from their natural properties or use value. Any change in exchange value is attributed to a change in the natural properties of the commodities themselves. Yet the value of a commodity, Marx argues, derives more precisely from the labour-time socially required for its production.

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists ... simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. ... It [the commodity form] is nothing but the definite social relation between [people] themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.⁵⁶

For this reason Marx refers to the labour-time socially necessary to produce a commodity as the secret of the commodity; as that which is congealed within its natural properties.

The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery destroys the semblance of the merely accidental determination of the magnitude of value of the products of labour, but by no means abolishes that determination's material form.⁵⁷

Not altogether dissimilarly to Benjamin's claim to read history in the transience of nature, Marx argues that what can be read in the apparently accidental, naturalistic value of commodities is the historical form of social labour. Yet the force of this naturalistic fetish, evident in the view that the capitalist law of commodity exchange is an immutable law of nature, arises through the seeming inevitability or invariance of that very process itself.

What this implies in the real progress of life to this day is the necessity of social semblance. Its core is value as a thing-in-itself, value as 'nature'. The natural growth of capitalist society is real, and at the same time it is that of semblance.⁵⁸

This semblance of natural growth and the social conventions supporting it will nevertheless evaporate once the process of commodity exchange begins to disintegrate under the historical weight of its immanent social contradictions.

⁵⁶ K. Marx, *Capital* op. cit., pp.164-165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.168.

⁵⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., pp.354-355.

What is at stake in the idea of natural history then is a negative dialectical analysis that will neither reduce history to a mythological form of naturalism nor sacrifice nature to the ontological abstractions of a transcendental historicity. Both these approaches sanction the sacrificial deliverance of human life to the fateful uncertainties of historical chance. In contrast, Marx outlines the idea of natural history in this way -

We know only a single science, the science of history. History can be considered from two sides, divided into the history of nature and the history of [humanity]. Yet there is no separating the two sides; as long as [people] exist, natural and human history will qualify each other.⁵⁹

While later Marxist theoreticians reduced this idea of natural history to a form of social Darwinism, they regressively defended just that naturalism of which Marx had been so critical.⁶⁰ Indeed the apparently natural fate of being consumed by a more powerful political species is just that pre-historical barbarity which Marx had critically debunked when addressing Hegel's historical ontology of difference and repetition. Natural history, Adorno argues, receives its clearest formulation in a passage from Marx's *Grundrisse*.

Much as the whole of this motion appears as a social process, much as the single moments of this motion take their departure from the conscious will and from particular purposes of individuals - the totality of the process does appear as an objective context arising by natural growth. It is indeed due to the interaction of conscious individuals, but neither seated in their consciousness nor subsumed under them as a whole.⁶¹

Nature and history are constantly entwined the one with the other, without, however, dissolving their difference in an ontological identity where the one or the other holds ultimate sway. Their unity is an antagonistic totality where each is the negative, antithetical sign of the other.

⁵⁹ K. Marx, *The German Ideology* [1846] in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 47 vols., London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, vol.5, p.28, cited by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.358. I have retained Ashton's translation. {translation modified between brackets}

⁶⁰ The two most prominent examples are Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* [1873-82] in *Marx-Engels Collected Works* op. cit., vol.25, 1987 and Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* [1908] Moscow, Progress, 1977.

⁶¹ K. Marx, *Grundrisse* [1857-58] tr. M. Nicholaus, London, Penguin, 1973, pp.196-197; cited by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* op. cit., p.355. I have retained Ashton's translation.