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Contents

Focal Point: On the Early Writings of Walter Benjamin 5
Howard Eiland

Hegel, Immanence, and Transcendence 29
James J. Chriss

Adorno's Insights in the Light of Exakte Phantasie 65
Alžběta Dyčková

Utopian Promises and the Risk of Regression – Erich Fromm and the Future of Work 79
Stefan Sauer and Manuel Nicklich

The Deleuze-Adorno encounter: on the critique of dialectics, the defense of negative dialectics and the negativity in Adorno's thought 105
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Phone: ~49(30)755 11 712, Email: info@xenomoi.de

Focal Point: On the Early Writings of Walter Benjamin[1]

Howard Eiland[2]

Abstract: Walter Benjamin's philosophy of youth, as documented in writings from the period 1912-1915, comprises a metaphysics (represented by his essay "Metaphysics of Youth"), an aesthetics (exemplified in "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin"), and a politics (in "The Life of Students"). Analysis of these three essays reveals the importance of Friedrich Nietzsche's influence on this philosophy, especially regarding the theory of historical awakening fundamental to the later work as well, the new historical consciousness that interprets the past from out of the energies and concerns of the present, and that registers a messianic gravitation within the groundless process of history. This is complemented in early Benjamin by a theory of educational awakening, at once ethical and erotic, involving an active dialectic of solitude and community, along with a conception of love as social work and social justice. Dogma and partisanship are precluded. Youth is understood as a broadly human capacity for learning and for living the life that art requires. Everyday life is to be filled with the death-haunted, animating spirit of youth.

Examined below are writings of Walter Benjamin from the period 1912 to 1915, when he was a university student at Freiburg and Berlin, and when he took part in the German Youth Movement in the years before the First World War. I shall consider his idea of youth in the context of a few writers who were especially important to the generation coming of age in those years: Tolstoy and Hölderlin, in particular, but also Bergson and above all Nietzsche. Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics—of the ideas of substance, causality, continuity, identity—and his experience of the groundlessness of being were clearly decisive for the young Benjamin's way of thinking, although it must be added that the Nietzschean

1 Originally presented as a talk for the Program in Critical Theory, University of California at Berkeley, April 2010.

2 Howard Eiland is author, with Michael W. Jennings, of *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (2014). He has translated Benjamin works such as *The Arcades Project* (1999, with Kevin McLaughlin), *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (2006), and *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (2019). He has also published *Notes on Literature, Film, and Jazz* (2019).

pathos has entirely evaporated in Benjamin's writing, even at this "early" stage. I shall lay emphasis also on a certain idea of historical reflection or historical "awakening," which again has its roots in the Nietzschean critique of nineteenth-century historicism and, back of that, in the idea of reflection informing Early German Romanticism. This notion of awakening, correlated naturally with a notion of dream, involves what Benjamin, at the beginning of his essay of 1914-1915, "The Life of Students," calls a "focal point" (*Brennpunkt*) of attention and remembrance, a concentration or nucleation of historical process in which the present moment of reflection gathers, intensifies, and thus constructs anew the meaning of past events, as though staging their afterlife. Here is how the essay begins:

> There is a conception of history that, trusting in the infinity of time, distinguishes only the tempo, rapid or slow, with which human beings and epochs advance along the path of progress. Corresponding to this is the incoherence, the imprecision and lack of rigor in the demand such a conception makes on the present. The following remarks, in contrast, concern a particular condition in which history [*Historie*] rests concentrated [*gesammelt*], as in a focal point, something seen from time immemorial in the utopian images of thinkers. The elements of the ultimate condition do not manifest themselves as formless progressive tendencies, but are deeply embedded in every present in the form of the most endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed creations and ideas. The historical task [*geschichtliche Aufgabe*] is to give shape to this immanent state of perfection and make it...visible and ascendant in the present.[3]

The gathering power of the image—it can be considered a power of distillation—is found again in the theory of the dialectical image at the center of Benjamin's later historiography, which is explicitly "monadological." But already in early Benjamin this schema of reciprocal concentration and radiation of energy, which may be traced back to post-Kantian philosophy, is understood as a messianic potential within history, that is,

3 Walter Benjamin, *Early Writings 1910-1917*, trans. Howard Eiland and Others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 197 ("The Life of Students," trans. Rodney Livingstone). Abbreviated below in notes as EW.

deep within history and within the conventions of the everyday, indeed within the most inconspicuous and abject corners of daily life. We shall return to this difficult and provocative idea of historical recollection, but it is worth emphasizing at the outset that the concern with an *immanent* messianic state, or rather gravitation, (as opposed to some endpoint outside of time) is a prominent unifying feature of what are sometimes thought to be irreconcilable stages—early idealism and later materialism—in Benjamin's thought.

The essay "The Life of Students" grew directly out of Benjamin's student activism during the final, intensive phase of the German Youth Movement, particularly during the spring of 1914, when, as president of the Berlin University chapter of the Independent Students' Association (*Freie Studentenschaft*), he gave a series of speeches at various assemblies of the school reform movement in order to advocate for his conception of the "new university" and the "new youth." His educational ideals at this time were shaped by his association with Gustav Wyneken, a leading light of the youth movement who had been Benjamin's teacher at the progressive country boarding school Haubinda in 1905-1906, and whose books and lectures, strongly colored by a Nietzschean tragic philosophy of life and a Hegelian notion of absolute spirit, helped determine the vision of educational reform in Germany and elsewhere in the first decades of the twentieth century. Although Benjamin eventually parted ways with his mentor after Wyneken publicly called on young people to support the German war effort, he did not repudiate the Wynekenian educational program, conditioned as this was by traditional liberal ideas about an integrated curriculum and the development of the individual personality within a community of scholars.

Thus, in "The Life of Students," Benjamin condemns the growing rigidification and compartmentalization of study and the widespread "perversion of the creative spirit into the vocational spirit." He refers to the "revolutionary magnitude of the task entailed in creating a community of learning, as opposed to a corporation of qualified functionaries." For in the development of the professional apparatus within the

universities, he argues, the modern disciplines have been drawn away from their "common origin in the idea of knowledge, an origin which in their eyes has become a mystery, if not a fiction."[4] How, then, to restore the fields of knowledge to their common or unifying origin (*ihrem einheitlichen Ursprung*)? It is not a matter of reconstructing some former state of affairs, as though the origin were simply the source or beginning of a sequence of events. The origin is rather that from out of which the whole phenomenon eventuates at each separate moment. As Benjamin conceives the matter in an essay on Hölderlin immediately preceding "The Life of Students," origin is the abiding foundation of all relations within a phenomenon (*das Beruhende aller Beziehungen*), the fundamental lawfulness governing the life of the phenomenon.[5] (These formulations from 1914-1915 anticipate and illuminate the better known characterization of *Ursprung* as historical "eddy," in Benjamin's book *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, from the mid-1920s.) The origin, in other words, emerges only in the investigation of the phenomenon as a whole, and it emerges more or less clearly according to the constructive power of recognition. To bring to light the common origin and inner unity of the academic disciplines would mean to discover that origin in and through the creatively fulfilled present—that is, in living philosophy. For what unifies the disciplines is the *idea* of knowledge—their fundamentally philosophic character, however hidden this may be at the present time. What Benjamin seems to envision, then, as a corrective to the external business of training and credentialization and the consequent instrumentalizing of knowledge, is a community of learning in which all study would be *essentially* philosophical.

To be sure, he does not concern himself with how such a transformation of academic life might come about, other than to suggest that it is a matter of subordinating the special fields of knowledge to the idea of the whole represented by the university itself—obviously not the same as subordinating them to the philosophy department. It is the collectivity

4 EW: 203, 198-99, 199.

5 EW: 180.

of the university as a working ideal, according to "The Life of Students," that is the true seat of authority:

> The community of creative human beings elevates every field of study to the universal: in the form of philosophy. Such universality is not achieved by confronting lawyers with literary questions, or doctors with legal ones (as various student groups have tried to do). It can be brought about only if the community ensures by its own efforts that before all specialization of studies (which cannot exist without reference to a profession), and beyond all the activities of the professional schools, it itself, the community of the university as such, will be the progenitor and guardian of the philosophical form of community—something grounded not in the problems posed by the narrow scientific discipline of philosophy but in the metaphysical questions of Plato and Spinoza, the Romantics and Nietzsche. This…would signify the closest link between profession and life, although a deeper life.[6]

A core of philosophy—and presumably this means a way of keeping in mind *questions* about the nature of reality and the nature of human being—would radiate through each specialized field, unsettling customary frameworks and introducing a more fluid and plastic mode of discourse, more somber and perhaps more playful as well, opening a horizon on a larger community of thought. There is a logical development here: from a recognition of the immanent unity of knowledge to a call for unifying the distinct academic disciplines, and from there to a demand for non-hierarchical relations between teachers and students and between males and females in the university community and in society at large. It was the role of students—in their devotion to "permanent spiritual revolution" as well as to "radical doubt"—to constitute an intellectual vanguard: to keep open a space for questioning and to propagate a "culture of conversation," so as not only to prevent the degeneration of study into mere accumulation of information but also to prepare the way for basic changes in the conduct of everyday life.[7]

6 EW: 204.

7 EW: 205, 202, 203.

Of course, for the student body to become "the great transformer"[8] of the university and even of the larger social scene, student life itself would have to be transformed. It would have to *awaken*—to become aware, first of all, of the advancing historical crisis concealed in the increasingly secure organization of life. At present, says Benjamin, student life is characterized for the most part by an uncritical and spineless acquiescence in the vocational demands of the age. He delivers a general indictment of the student body, from the dueling fraternities to his own constituents in the Independent Students Association, for their faint-heartedness, conformism, and small-mindedness, their sacrifice of the "peril of spiritual life"[9] to bourgeois security, and their repudiation of those conditions that foster true study and creativity. The vocational ideology, he argues, with its mechanical conception of duty as opposed to a duty arising from the work itself, has stifled any true vocation one might feel for learning and teaching. The organization of the university has ceased to be grounded in the productivity of its students, as its founders had envisaged; they thought of students, says Benjamin, as teachers and learners at the same time: "as teachers, because productivity means complete independence, regard for knowledge, no longer for the teacher…. Such dangerous devotion to learning and to youth must already live in the students as the capacity to love, and it must be the root of their creativity."[10]

Now, Benjamin's idea of love, in his student writings, can be examined within various intellectual and social contexts. There is first of all the program of sexual enlightenment within the youth movement, a program which itself has many sides, as indicated in Walter Laqueur's well known book on the German youth movement, *Young Germany*. Gustav Wyneken, Benjamin's mentor, was one of the first European educators to institute coeducation (at the secondary school he founded at Wickersdorf in the Thuringian Forest in 1906), and, following his example, the student contributors to the pre-war journal of youth, *Der Anfang* (The Inception),

8 EW: 205

9 EW: 205

10 EW: 204.

earnestly took up the call for a revamping of sexual mores. As a regular contributor to *Der Anfang* from his high school days onward, Benjamin stressed the importance of coeducation in several of his articles and talked about "erotic education" and erotic culture, as well as the "erotic unculture" (*erotischen Unkultur*) of the bourgeois family and of prostitution.[11] He penned a "Conversation on Love" around 1913, in which it is said that there is "only *one* love" and "love...engenders goodness…. The only people who can love are those who want to be good." To which the interlocutor replies: "And also want the beloved to be good." "It's the same thing," he is told.[12] Palpable here is the Platonic idealism that runs through much of Benjamin's youth philosophy. (Two of the speakers in the "Conversation on Love" are named Agathon and Sophia.) For all its evident erotic charge, this love is aligned with friendship and moral betterment, *philia* or, if you like, *agapē*. The ethically colored erotics of the early Benjamin, where the concept of "purity" coexists Hamlet-like with the concept of "danger," foreshadows his later research on the socialist utopian-satirical writer, Charles Fourier, and the harmonized eroticism of the "phalanstery." At the same time, the concern with prostitution, which involves both an attack on exploitation and a fascination with the figure of the prostitute, looks forward to the multi-angled presentation of this figure as one of the nineteenth-century "types" populating *The Arcades Project*. Such varied approaches from different periods of Benjamin's career may suggest what is at stake in the conception of love as the root of creativity.

Contemporaneously with the discourse on love and eros, Benjamin affirms the necessity of renunciation: "The basic determinant of the moral is renunciation [*Abkehr*], not motivation through self-interest, nor any utility."[13] This from a piece entitled "Moral Education" published in 1913 in a quarterly journal edited by Gustav Wyneken. One could cite similar statements from other of Benjamin's student writings. Hence his ex-

11 EW: 166-67 ("Erotic Education," 1914).

12 EW: 139, 142.

13 EW: 112.

pressions of dismay with student bonhomie at convocations of the youth movement, such as the three-day gathering of over two thousand young people in the fall of 1913 on a hilltop named "Hohe Meissner," where the charismatic Wyneken delivered the keynote address, and where there was folk dancing and festive attire, while "youth," Benjamin wrote, remained silent.[14] And hence his denunciation of the typically philistine mixture of joviality and nostalgia in the reunions of the fraternities. His strictures are directed against both the lack of sobriety and "seriousness" (*Ernst*) and the adulteration of erotic feeling.

In "The Life of Students," these themes come together in the invocation of the "Tolstoyan spirit," which, he says, has failed to find entry into student circles. What is at issue for Benjamin here is a conception of love as social work, although what he means by "social work" (*soziale Arbeit*) in the context of student life remains somewhat unspecified:

> Students have not been able to demonstrate the spiritual necessity [of social work] and for that reason have never been able to establish a truly serious community based on it, but only a community where zeal for duty is allied to self-interest. That Tolstoyan spirit which laid bare the huge gulf between bourgeois and proletarian existence, the concept that service on behalf of the poor is the task of mankind and not a spare-time student activity, the concept that here, precisely *here*, it was all or nothing, that spirit which took root in the ideas of the most profound anarchists and in Christian monastic orders, this truly serious spirit of a social work, which had no need of childlike attempts to empathize with the soul of the workers or of the people—this spirit failed to develop in student communities.[15]

Looking back on his student days from the perspective of incipient exile in 1932, he views the youth movement in a similarly critical, if elegiac, light: "It was a final, heroic attempt to change the attitudes of people without changing their circumstances. We did not know that it was bound to fail, but there were hardly any of us whose resolve such knowledge

14 EW: 135-36 ("Youth Was Silent," 1913).

15 EW: 201.

could have altered." The Tolstoyan faith in the gradual modification of consciousness has at this point receded before a more revolutionary imperative: "no one can improve his school or his parental home without first smashing the state that needs bad ones."[16] Already in 1917, writing from St. Moritz to his close friend Ernst Schoen, Benjamin speaks of being saved from the wreck of the youth movement, "whose preeminence experienced such a total and precipitous decline. Everything was downfall, except for the little that let me live my life, …and I find myself saved here in more than one sense: not for the leisure, security, calm of life, but in having escaped the demonic and ghostly influences which are prevalent wherever we turn.[17]"

During his early university years, Benjamin could affirm the political reality of his student activism while remaining at a distance from practical politics. Given that politics, in the narrow sense, is inevitably the vehicle of political parties rather than ideas, political action, he concludes, can be a matter, in the end, of only one thing: the art of choosing the lesser evil.[18] Yet he could still envision an "honest and honorable socialism," as opposed to the conventional socialism of the day,[19] and he could appeal to the sense that "all our humanity is a sacrifice to the spirit" and that therefore we should "tolerate no private feelings, no private will and spirit"[20]—which may sound a little odd coming from a man who, less than a decade later, was passionately collecting rare books and original artworks for his personal pleasure, and who carefully protected his privacy even from his closest friends. At any rate, the young man's

16 Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 605-06 ("A Berlin Chronicle" [1932], trans. Edmund Jephcott). Abbreviated below in notes as SW2.

17 *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*, trans. Manfred and Evelyn Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 91. Abbreviated below in notes as C.

18 Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, *Band I, 1910-1918*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), 82-83 (January 7, 1913, to Ludwig Strauss). Abbreviated below in notes as GB1.

19 EW: 71 ("Dialogue on the Religiosity of the Present," 1912).

20 C: 35 (June 23, 1913, to Herbert Belmore).

faith in education—the belief that politics begins in education and comes to fruition in culture—continued to motivate his protest against school and family, and continued to provide the model for what he called his "ethical program."[21] And perhaps it is not so very different, at bottom, with the programmatic writings of his later years, in which technological innovation (radio, film) is conceived as a training ground for more emancipatory social relations, and where the concept of study retains its urgency.

What is specifically ethical in Benjamin's youth philosophy is an idea of friendship taking the form of dialogue, which happened to be one of the young Benjamin's preferred forms as a writer (together with the essay, short story, poem, aphorism, and diary). It is an idea of friendship predicated on distance between friends, *eine Freundschaft der fremden Freunde*, friends who are also strangers.[22] Again, the classical precedents—the Platonic idea of friendship as the spiritual kinship of equals, the Kantian unsocial sociability, the Nietzschean hundred deep solitudes—are palpable. Friendship is understood as the agonistic medium of a mutually nourishing (that is, mutually educative) relationship. Which always unfolds with a view to the whole of humanity. For there is no real happiness without social justice. This is another way of stressing the dialectic of solitude and community that is at the heart of the Benjaminian youth philosophy. Solitude is to be cultivated as the precondition of community, but only within a community can solitude be meaningful. Benjamin expands on the paradox in a letter of August 4, 1913, to his comrade in the youth movement, Carla Seligson, a medical student in Berlin: "I believe we may ask: Where are those who are solitary nowadays? Only an idea and a community in the idea can lead them to that, to solitude. I believe it is true that only a person who has made the idea his own…can be solitary; such a person, I believe, must be solitary. I believe that only in community, and indeed in the most intimate community of believers, can a person be truly solitary.… The deepest solitude is that of the ideal

21 EW: 66 ("Dialogue on the Religiosity of the Present").

22 GB1: 182 (November 17, 1913, to Carla Seligson).

human being [*des idealen Menschen*] in relation to the idea, which destroys what is human in the human. And this solitude, the deeper type, we can expect only from a fulfilled community."[23] A power of destruction in the idea is accordingly necessary for social construction: the human being must both overcome and fulfill the ego-oriented humanity, through resistance to and simultaneous absorption in the idea, in order thereby to bring about a fully human, that is, ideal community, a "community in the idea"—which heralds the "community of learning" and "philosophical form of community" outlined in "The Life of Students."

It is characteristic of Benjamin's idea of youth, nurtured as it is on the tradition of German Romanticism culminating in Nietzsche, to seek to incorporate and mediate opposing tendencies in a new way of seeing, requiring nothing short of a "new humanity." He would later refer to the "contradictory and mobile whole" of his convictions "in their multiplicity,"[24] and this formula can serve as well to characterize the dynamic of "Youth." An essentially vibratory reality is at issue here: thus the vocabulary of "radiation," "tension," "interpenetration" in the essay "Metaphysics of Youth" (discussed below). And thus the stance of *readiness* that distinguishes youth as a state of being in its own right, and not simply a preparatory transition to the "real world" of adulthood. It is not that one has great expectations for the future, but that in those who—at any age—are capable of youth there is at work a "constantly vibrating," "eternally actualizing" process of spirit that transcends the conventional distinction between active and passive. In a letter of September 15, 1913, to Carla Seligson, Benjamin says that to be young means to be ready in this rather esoteric sense—to *await* the spirit's coming: "To see it in every person and in the most remote thought. This is the most important thing: we must not commit ourselves to one specific idea, [not even to] the idea of youth culture… For then (if we do not turn ourselves into mere workers in a movement), if we keep our gaze free to see the spirit wherever it

23 C: 50 (translation modified).

24 *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940*, trans. Gary Smith and Andrew Lefevere (New York: Schocken, 1989), 108-09 (April 28, 1934).

may be, we will be the ones to actualize it." Youth, he declares, is "this constantly reverberating [*vibrierende*] feeling for the abstractness of pure spirit;" such "feeling" precludes dogma and partisanship.[25] "Abstractness" is here effectively synonymous with the idea of freedom: rather than allowing itself to become fixed in any determinate position, the soul of youth seeks to liberate the spirit in itself and others, generating the constellation of communicating distances. This metaphysical initiative is at the same time its immediate political task.

Integral to the continuous spiritual revolution of studious life is therefore a transformed experience of space and time, leading to a new historical consciousness. Such is the premise of Benjamin's essay of 1913-1914, "Metaphysics of Youth" (*Metaphysik der Jugend*), which circulated in manuscript among a circle of friends but remained unpublished during the author's lifetime. It will be evident that Benjamin's is a post-classical metaphysics, deriving in large part, as I've suggested, from the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics and of historicism, that is, the critique of history understood as a homogeneous continuum of events reduced to causes and effects. But the Nietzschean eventism—the presentation of reality in terms of fields of force that are fields of interpretation, and the presentation of the past as always interpreted from out of the energy of the present—is supplemented in Benjamin's thought by a Bergsonian theory of memory. For the problem of memory, it may be said, is the weak link in Nietzsche's doctrine of universal will to power. Benjamin took a seminar on Bergson at Freiburg with the Neokantian Heinrich Rickert in the summer of 1913, and it was evidently during that summer that he began his "Metaphysics of Youth." He says in a letter that he would mainly "just sit and pursue [his] own thoughts" in Rickert's weekly seminar,[26] but it is clear that Bergson's post-Nietzschean philosophy—in which theory of knowledge and theory of life are inseparable, in which perception is in things and not just in the mind, while things are essentially processes—had a profound and lasting impact on his thinking. "Metaphysics of

25 C: 54-55.

26 C: 31 (June 7, 1913, to Herbert Belmore).

Youth" begins with a vivid adaptation of Bergson's central thesis about memory in his book *Matière et mémoire*, first published in 1896 and translated into German in 1908. In contrast to the instrumental or psychological conception of memory as a mere storehouse of mental impressions, memory is conceived ontologically as the survival and imagistic actualization of the past in its manifold depth;[27] it is not first of all a faculty but an element of all experience, a stratified medium. As Benjamin would put it in 1932: "Memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried."[28] Past and future are not to be conceived in linear fashion as cause and effect but rather as interwoven dimensions, out of whose confrontation the present is born. To the extent that it recognizes itself, the present moment of experience is the concentration and expansion, the focal point, of time. The critical-historical task announced at the beginning of "The Life of Students" is neither the pursuit of progress nor the restitution of the past but the excavation of this present, in which is embedded an "immanent state of perfection" in the form of the most "endangered" and "excoriated" conceptions, precisely what escapes the eye of the conventional historiographer.

Benjamin's distinctive innovation in "Metaphysics of Youth"—it is a basic component of the theory of historical knowledge in *The Arcades Project*—is to conceive the relation of past and present in terms of dream and awakening. This is a dialectical relation, for one fully awakens from the dream only by descending back into it and exploring its furthest and darkest recesses. The dream energies pervade our waking life, however, without our necessarily recognizing them. Thus, the opening sentences of the essay: "Each day, like sleepers, we use unmeasured energies. What we do and think is filled with the being of our...ancestors. An uncomprehended symbolism unceremoniously enslaves us.—Sometimes, on awak-

27 Nietzsche had already written, in a note of 1895: "That which is experienced lives on [*das Erlebte lebt fort*] 'in memory.' I cannot help it if it 'comes back'… Who calls it? Wakes it?" *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 274 (no. 502).

28 SW2: 611 ("A Berlin Chronicle").

ing, we remember a dream. In this way rare flashes of insight illuminate the ruins of our energy, heaps of rubble time has passed by."[29] The past is a dream that continually haunts, accompanies, and guides us—even as it dreams us, its own awakening. Insofar as the present moment wakes to the dream of the past, it wakens *from* it, gathering itself together in the process and hence transforming the ruins which consciousness makes of the dream. The situation is not exactly clarified by mellifluous paronomastic sentences like: *Die ewig gewesene Gegenwart wird wieder werden* ("The present that has been eternally will again come to be"), which exemplifies a vein of mannerism in the essay, related to the self-consciously modernist archaicism. The essay elaborates the idea of interwoven time by means of the motif of conversation—of that which constantly rises out of and returns to an unappropriated frontier of silence—along with the motif of the diary or daybook, which is articulated by its spatiotemporal intervals. In both conversation and diary, language is directed in a particularly dynamic way toward past and future simultaneously.

The central section of the essay, entitled "The Diary," comprises a kind of philosophic rhapsody on the theme of self-awakening and self-inscription. The diary, writes Benjamin (who kept personal and travel diaries), is "an act of liberation, secret and uncircumscribed in its victory. No unfree spirit will understand this book."[30] It is an act characteristic of and indeed definitive of youth. To write the diary is to penetrate to a dimension of "youthful time, immortal time," which at once flows through ordinary chronological time and exceeds it. Here is how Benjamin describes the advent of the diary, the "book *of* time" which—emerging periodically from the pregnant silence of its intervals, as the reflective "I" breaks out of its devouring ordinary being—writes itself:

> When the self, devoured by yearning for itself,...nevertheless saw itself condemned to calendar time, clock-time, and stock-exchange time, and no ray of any time of immortality filtered down to it—then it began of itself to radiate. It knew: I am myself ray.

29 EW: 144 ("The Metaphysics of Youth," trans. Rodney Livingstone).

30 EW: 150.

> Not the murky inwardness of the one who experiences [*jenes Erlebenden*], who calls me "I" and torments me with his intimacies, but ray of that other which seemed to oppress me and which after all I myself am: ray of time. Trembling, an "I" that we know only from our diaries stands on the brink of the immortality into which it plunges. It is indeed *time*. In that self to which events occur and which encounters human beings—friends, enemies, and lovers—in that self courses immortal time.[31]

If the diary (*Tagebuch*) is Benjamin's conceit for representing the book of days, the punctuated web of spacetime in which we gravitate from one state to the next, it also constitutes a "rite of purification" for the self inscribed in its pages; in the diary, we "befall ourselves [*widerfahren wir uns selbst*]," we find ourselves at a distance from ourselves and come to meet ourselves from out of the landscape we have entered.[32] Or, in another formulation, we flow over things with the time of our existence—"we, the time of things."[33] We thus incarnate at every moment the "rhythm of time,"[34] which bears its end in its unfolding, which sends us curving back on ourselves through the futural trajectory of a path. Under the encompassing "spell of the book,"[35] we are drawn far and near; we sink toward the center with things while awaiting the new radiance. It is, then, a rhythm of redemption, and from the intervals of diary-writing—can we say, simply, writing?—are engendered "resurrections of the self."[36] Again recognizable is the dialectic of concentration and expansion variously informing these representations, this field-metaphoric in which time is figured as a surrounding landscape—"all that happens surrounds us as landscape"—and space as a radiant vibration; for "time sends forth [the self] in ever widening waves. This is the landscape."[37]

31 EW: 150-51. The term "immortal time" (*unsterbliche Zeit*) anticipates Benjamin's term "eternal transience" (*ewige Vergängnis*).

32 EW: 156.

33 EW: 152.

34 EW: 154.

35 EW: 153.

36 EW: 152.

37 EW: 152.

Bergson had written that we do not *think* real time so much as *live* it. For whatever the categorial intellect touches, it turns to solids.[38] (He is echoing Nietzsche's critique of atomism.) In the Benjaminian diary or book of time, the reified, instrumentalized framework of clock-time—with its basis in what Bergson calls the logic of solids[39]—is dissolved. For Benjamin, this is ultimately an experience of "the time of death."[40] As the "loving enemy," death enters the diary by way of the conscience, the real author and reader of the diary. Conscience reminds us, at intervals, of our beginning and end, keeps returning to confront us in our inner estrangement and to incite us to overcome ourselves in love of the other, and thus discloses at certain junctures the horizon of immortality. In "The Life of Students," Benjamin speaks of the fettering of "intellectual conscience" by the vocational ideology of the professions.[41] Here, he associates conscience with a power of distancing that brings home what is nearest (and hence most easily overlooked and most remote): the imminence of death, the death in all things. "But past things become futural," we read at the close of the section "The Diary." "They send forth the time of the self anew when they have entered into the distance, into the interval…. [T]he time of death was the time of our diary, death was the last interval, death the first loving enemy, death, which bears us with all our greatness and the destinies of our wide plain into the unnameable midpoint of times. And which for a single moment gives us immortality. Manifold and simple, this is the content of our diaries… For there is immortality only in death, and time rises up at the end of times."

This heightened consciousness of death, so characteristic of the prewar Expressionist era,[42] has a specific complement in Benjamin's essay

38 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1906), trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 46.

39 *Creative Evolution*, ix.

40 EW: 156.

41 EW: 205.

42 Soon after idealizing death in "Metaphysics of Youth," Benjamin was confronted with the double suicide of his close friends, C. F. Heinle and Friederike Seligson (sister of Carla Seligson), on the eve of World War I, amidst the unraveling of the youth move-

"Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin." Toward the end of 1914, while living in Berlin in his parents' villa and taking courses at the university, Benjamin, aged 22, embarked on a study of Hölderlin, whose works were then being published to widespread acclaim in the critical-historical edition by Norbert von Hellingrath (a member of the conservative Stefan George circle). The new edition occasioned a resurgence of interest in this lofty and difficult Romantic poet, who had been all but forgotten in the early years of the Wilhelmine Empire, and caused a sensation in particular among students. Of course, the poetry of Hölderlin, which great numbers of German soldiers carried to the front in a special "knapsack edition," was not for Benjamin an icon of German nationalism, or of the "secret Germany" of the George circle, but a warrant of artistic integrity, something in which the idea of humanity was at stake. To be sure, the young Benjamin was not immune to the cultic view of "the poet" to be found not only in Hölderlin but in a line of successors reaching from Nietzsche's Zarathustra through the knightly figures of Jugendstil to Stefan George himself, that hero of pre-war youth. Benjamin's first publication—in *Der Anfang* in 1910, under the pseudonym "Ardor"—was a poem entitled "Der Dichter," about the poet who dwells on high. But in the winter of 1914-1915, he argues for a revision in the idea of hero, a moral revision that nonetheless stays close to the original idea of tragic sacrifice, and of life as fate. In "The Life of Students," Benjamin will criticize the academy for its "hostile and uncomprehending estrangement… from the life that art requires."[43] It is that life which is now meditated. In Hölderlin's famous phrase, which he quotes, it is a life "sacredly sober," *heilignüchtern*,[44] and for Benjamin this means: beyond all exaltation in the sublime.

In the essay on Hölderlin he produced that winter, the ethical sphere comes together with the metaphysical and aesthetic in the concepts of

ment. This most somber of war protests would haunt him for the rest of his life. See SW2, 605 ("A Berlin Chronicle").

43 EW: 203.

44 EW: 193 ("Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin," trans. Stanley Corngold), citing Hölderlin's poem "Hälfte des Lebens" (Half of Life, 1802-1803).

"poetic task" and "poetic destiny." The fulfillment of the task that is the *work* of art is studied in the context of Hölderlin's very distinctive revision process, by means of a detailed analysis of two poems concerned with the figure of the poet, "Dichtermut" (The Poet's Courage) and "Blödigkeit" (Timidity), the latter a revision of the former. (It was still not customary, by the way, to devote what Benjamin calls an aesthetic commentary—distinguished from a philological one—to individual works by a modern author, although Benedetto Croce, in his *Aesthetics* of 1902, had opened the way to criticism of the individual work of art as an irreducible aesthetic fact, the more or less successful solution of a specific "artistic problem.") In Benjamin's rigorous and perhaps tortuous analysis, the greater formal perfection of the later of the two Hölderlin poems is shown to arise from deeper thought, that is, from more deeply felt thought, namely, on the relation of the poet to the people and of life to death. The revision also bespeaks a greater distance from the Greek model informing the earlier poem, greater distance from the consciously mythological, and it brings into play a new understanding of courage, the poet's courage, as "timidity" or "diffidence" (how do you translate Hölderlin's *Blödigkeit*?)—which is to say, comprehensive and creative receptivity to a life that has ceased to resist the annihilating and grounding power of death, so as to incorporate it into its every moment.

"The transformation of the duality of death and poet into the unity of a dead poetic world, 'saturated with danger,' is the relation in which the poetized of both poems resides."[45] The term "poetized" (which is found in Emerson) translates Benjamin's term, *das Gedichtete*, a substantive formed from the past participle of the verb *dichten*, "to compose artistically." With this usage he wants to emphasize the process—not of poetic composition in the usual sense—but of emergent configuration, the constellation of poetic form from out of the concentration of a life-context. It is in the process of formation—formation of a nascent content—that the poetic task is first established, for in Benjamin's dialectical thinking, the "task is derived from the poem itself," though it is also the precondition

45 EW: 192.

of the poem, "the intellectual-perceptual structure [*geistig-anschauliche Struktur*] of that world to which the poem bears witness."[46] The poetized, that which is poetically formed, is both the achieved formal articulation of a poetic world and what is meaningfully articulated. It is a transition from the meaning, or "functional unity," of life to that of the poem: "In the poetized, life determines itself through the poem, the task through the solution"[47]—just as, in the "Metaphysics of Youth," the diary is said to write itself. It is in this process-character, then, that the truth of the particular poem comes to light, comes to be felt. Such poetic objectivity has everything to do with the fact that the poetized, which is configured differently in each poetic work, emerges only in the *reading* of the work: "This sphere," we are told at the outset, "is at once subject and product of the investigation."[48] The concept of the poetized, which is understood to comprise the poem's own critical momentum, thus prefigures the concept of criticism as "afterlife" of the work criticized, a concept first expounded in Benjamin's 1919 dissertation, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," and subsequently developed, under the rubric "the afterlife of works," in various of his writings, notably *The Arcades Project*. In the Hölderlin essay, Benjamin's theoretic stance vis-à-vis traditional aesthetics is unorthodox, to say the least, being oriented simultaneously toward a strict (but not empty) formalism and an appreciation of the philosophical and testamentary content of art.

The anticlassical metaphysical principles we've seen at work in "The Life of Students" and "Metaphysics of Youth"—his "politics" and "metaphysics," respectively—are not lacking here in his "aesthetics." Conventional oppositions, such as that of form and content, are worked though and overcome. The principle of the spatiotemporal, which is a principle of rhythm, governs the commentary on the poems. What distinguishes the Hölderlinian revision process, which is no less architectonic than intuitive, is at once a dissolving and making fluid of the elements of the

46 EW: 171.

47 EW: 173.

48 EW: 172.

earlier poem and their more intensive interrelation. Integral to the increasing formative power is an increasing plasticity. Benjamin speaks of the "inner temporal plasticity" of the form of the later poem and its relation to the "plastic structure of thought in its intensity."[49] The imagery of the later poem is both more concrete and more suffused with a spiritual principle, for "plasticity of form is revealed as that which is spiritual [*das Geistige*]."[50] In the later poem, "the temporal form is broken from the inside out as something animated."[51] This is where the death in life has done its work:

> In [the second version of the poem] a spiritual principle has become completely dominant: the unification of the heroic poet with the world. The poet does not have to fear death; he is a hero because he lives the center of all relations. The principle of the poetized as such is the supreme sovereignty of relation. In this particular poem, it is figured as courage, as the innermost identity of the poet with the world, emanating from which are all the identities of the perceptual and the intellectual in this poem…. All known relations are united in death, which is the poet's world.[52]

In Hölderlin's revision, there is a "direction of concentration" (*Richtung der Konzentration*) in which "each figure…finds its concentration in itself" and, thus concretized, "gravitate[s] toward existence as pure idea."[53] This dialectic of formation is the key to the greater "spatiotemporal interpenetration" of relations in the later poem, where the true has become something "traversable;" this dialectic is also the key to the functional—not substantive—coherence of perceptual and intellectual elements and to the punctuated and recapitulatory, "plastic-intensive" progression of the poetic line.[54] It is the same with the "temporally in-

49 EW: 187.

50 EW: 186.

51 EW: 189.

52 EW: 191-92.

53 EW: 186.

54 EW: 180, 184, 186.

ward intervention of the poet," this isolated figure who, Benjamin says, occupies "the untouchable center of all relation."[55] That is his vulnerability and privation as well as his strength. The later poem summons the poet to a certain nakedness: "Therefore, my genius, only step/ naked into life.../ Whatever happens, let it be opportune for you! [*gelegen dir!]*"[56] Benjamin comments: "Transposed into the middle of life, he has nothing remaining to him except motionless existence, complete passivity, which is the essence of the courageous person—nothing except to surrender himself wholly to relation. It emanates from him and returns to him… The poet is nothing but a limit with respect to life, point of indifference [*die Indifferenz*], surrounded by the immense sensuous powers and the idea."[57] As in "The Life of Students," the power of surrender is crucial here to the tempering and formation of the creative spirit. Only conscious, sober, critical immersion in the sensuous powers and the idea, to the point of their interpenetration in the image, can enable the poet to work through the "unmastered duality"[58] of the earlier draft. As the point of "indifference"—the groundless, essentially anonymous human self opened out to the flux of life—the poet becomes the invisible nucleus, the central moment, of world-relations, which in their concrete spiritual meaning emanate from and return to the sphere of poetic destiny. The simultaneously concentrated and expansive structure of the monad, the schema of the "focal point" with which we began, is again in evidence. The exposed subjectivity of the poet is an ideal objectivity, a "dead poetic world" growing out of and falling back into the living historical community.

If we can still speak of education here, it is an education in art, in that which has its origin, according to this viewpoint, in the experience of death as "ingathering" (*Einkehr* [Hölderlin's term]).[59] It is the fate of art

55 EW: 189, 192.

56 EW: 184.

57 EW: 192.

58 EW: 178.

59 EW: 179.

that is finally at issue in the more invisible radicalism, which lives with the ghosts of youth.[60] A decade later, when Benjamin has exited the university and begun to establish himself as a free-lance writer in Weimar Germany, the invisible radicalism can still be felt vibrating within the urbanity of the feuilletonist. The themes of Benjamin's early writings naturally undergo transformation with time, but they are recognizably present in his later and better known productions. There are virtually no false steps in the early work. And there are rich threads there that are only marginally put to use in later years, like the theory of color (delineated in the 1915 dialogue, "The Rainbow," and elsewhere). To be sure, the university as such is no longer a primary focus of Benjamin's mature concerns, although, as we indicated, the idea of study—and awakening—remains all-important; in place of student life as subject matter will emerge the life of the child.

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The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940,

60 "We all nourish an awareness of the fact that our radicalism was too much a gesture, and that a harder, purer, more invisible radicalism should become axiomatic for us" (C, 74 [October 25, 1914, to Ernst Schoen]).

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Hegel, Immanence, and Transcendence

James J. Chriss[1]

Abstract: Theodor Adorno described efforts to read and understand Hegel as skoteinos, that is, darkness. There is a murkiness in grappling with Hegel's thought, which from the standard empiricist or positivist position is viewed as elliptical, seemingly going in circles with no real resolution and rendered as ultimately meaningless. I have approached Hegel and phenomenology in ways similar to Adorno's description: "Where Hegel is emphatically rejected—in positivism in particular—he is hardly even given consideration nowadays."[2] Yet, a thinker as profound as Hegel deserves more thoughtful consideration than this, even if in the end the verdict—my verdict—favors the empiricists or materialists. The intellectual stimulation of working through Hegel's thought is the ultimate reward, contributing to the securing of the life of the mind.

The Axial Age and Transcendentalism

Karl Jaspers (and later Robert Bellah) argued for pivotal movements of self-conscious awareness which led to the "discovery" of transcendental aspects of life on earth and its connection to the broader cosmos. Early in his *Man in the Modern Age*, Jaspers argues that movements of social thought beginning in the Axial Age were marked by a new self-consciousness emerging from a critique of ancient wisdom handed down through the generations.[3] Indeed, for Karl Jaspers the exemplary movement of such thought is the Christian conception of historical progress "toward the fulfillment of a plan of salvation."[4] Even before

1 James J. Chriss is professor in the Department of Criminology and Sociology at Cleveland State University. His latest book is *Social Control: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Polity, 2022).

2 Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*. Trans. S.W. Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 95.

3 The Axial Age is the period 500 – 300 BCE during which the great religions of Eurasia emerged, specifically those of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. See Nicolas Baumard et al., "What Changed during the Axial Age: Cognitive Styles or Reward Systems?" *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 8 (5) (2015):1-3.

4 Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*. Trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (Garden City, NY:

Jaspers, Leonard Hobhouse made a similar argument, asserting that religion provides the common bond which binds all likeminded persons in a community, standing as the essential element in the formation of a social consciousness "strengthening its hold upon the minds of men."[5]

Jaspers' existentialism is influenced by Hegel's becoming—to which we will return shortly—that is, the entirety of the encompassing realities impinging upon us from all directions, the experience of which is ceaseless and ever present. The encompassing is a felt reality but, at the same time, never becomes a proper object for us.[6] It is akin to the eternal lifeworld within which we find ourselves in all our doings, and there is no escape—and no chance of receding or hiding from it—to the extent that we are intermingled with fellow human beings (through role relations) while carrying out our tasks in some physical venue occupied by others.[7] It is an immanence which is not an object. But we do also know that we somehow exist within this encompassing, which is Jaspers' somewhat grudging acknowledgement of the Cartesian knowing subject. Following Kierkegaard, Jaspers argues that existence cannot be grasped rationally even while guarding against a slide into solipsistic anti-rationalism.[8] To maintain some semblance of rationalism, Jaspers goes on to utilize Kant's transcendental "thinking consciousness" to connect up immanence and transcendence within the encompassing. This is close to the same stance Husserl took toward the question of Kant's

Anchor Books, 1957), 4.

5 Leonard T. Hobhouse, *Social Evolution and Political Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), 128.

6 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*. Trans. R.F. Grabau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971b).

7 Aron Gurwitsch, *Human Encounters in the Social World* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1979).

8 Udo Tietz notes that Sartre classified Jaspers as a Christian existentialist and Heidegger as an atheistic existentialist, which is consistent with some of the later discussion which turns briefly to Heidegger in relation to Giorgio Agamben's brand of postsecularism. See Udo Tietz, "German Existence-Philosophy." In H.L. Dreyfuss and M.A. Wrathall (eds.), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 163, and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*. Trans. B. Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947).

rationalism, especially with regard to the question of the grounding of his transcendental deductions.[9]

For the most part in this discussion, I treat immanence and transcendence straightforwardly as representing, respectively, on the one hand elements of empirical reality available to the senses, while on the other hand metaphysical entities posited as exerting influences upon the physical realm either from high above (elevation) or deep below (reduction or foundation, the paradigmatic case here being poststructuralism).[10] Within theology, philosophy, and certain theoretical sciences (e.g., cosmological physics), however, these two concepts—immanence and transcendence—can take on strange forms and countenances. For example, up to this point my summary of Jaspers' existential phenomenology had not dealt with such peculiar ideas as his consciousness as boundary or the distinction between being and being-in-itself, the latter of which is needed for Jaspers to differentiate between subjectivity, objectivity, and Existenz. This thereby allows Jaspers to go beyond objectivity and subjectivity to the cipher of existence, the speculative readings of which lead to transcendence and God, namely, Plotinus' One.[11] Even stranger, is the radical deconstructionism of Deleuze and Guattari's plane of immanence where life and death meet at the final limit where schizophrenia conceptualizes bodies without organs. The authors play with space and time, careening from immanence to transcendence and back again across a thousand plateaus and thresholds in their grotesque "schizoanalysis."[12] Husserl's positing of the phenomenological reduction is of a piece with this, as from the original vantagepoint of mathematics the abyss of the

9 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. D. Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 103-104.

10 This discussion extends some observations on immanence and transcendence from an earlier paper. See James Chriss, "Explorations in Philosophy and Theology: Agamben and Vico," *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 5 (2) (2021):169-222.

11 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, vol. 3. Trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971a).

12 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

infinite is glimpsed, driving some to madness trying to reach it or understand it.[13]

Jaspers' project shows up in various streams of existential and phenomenological philosophy. For example, synthesizing the work of Husserl along with that of Aristotle and Heidegger while seeking to incorporate transcendence and immanence within a dialectic movement, Alexei Chernyakov argues that the self, the concept of being, and the concept of time are linked.[14] To this Being-Time-Self triad Chernyakov added a fourth element, namely persons' relationship to God, and this gives rise to complete consciousness which Jaspers and others attributed to the role of religion beginning in the Axial Age. Truth is unconcealment, the Greek *Alethia*, which for Heidegger is freedom or *Dasein*.[15] Likewise for Husserl, phenomenology seeks to understand phenomena as the being of beings, where hiding is impossible. It is a science of being, of ontology, namely, the procedure of revealing Being itself—*Dasein*—the ontic structures of a phenomenological entity. It is not necessarily a thinking being, but rather, existence, akin to Giorgio Agamben's bare life or Husserl's physical body.[16] The phenomenological reduction may get at this ontic structure of being, of *Dasein*, as a being-present, that is, as being

13 Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*. This alludes to the apocryphal story of Husserl's mentor, the mathematician Georg Cantor, who innovated the study of infinite mathematics and who eventually was committed to a sanatorium in his later years. It is likely, however, that Cantor's mental illness emerged independently of his mathematical work. For more on the latter, see Amir Aczel, *The Mystery of the Aleph: Mathematics, the Kabbalah, and the Search for Infinity* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000) and Claire Ortiz Hill, "Did Georg Cantor Influence Edmund Husserl?" *Synthese* 113 (1) (1997):145-170.

14 Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences* and Alexie Chernyakov, *The Ontology of Time: Being and Time in the Philosophies of Aristotle, Husserl and Heidegger* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002).

15 Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth." Trans. J. Sallis. In D.F. Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (117-141) (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Heidegger is of course a controversial figure because of his Fascism. Yet even so Heidegger maintained a long and cordial correspondence with Karl Jaspers who, even while criticizing his conduct, nevertheless recognized the value of his thought. See Walter Biemel and Hans Saner (eds.), *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963)*. Trans. G.E. Aylesworth (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003).

16 See Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences* and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

present to consciousness. It is not a thing existing-in-itself, for what good does that do if it is not perceived? This takes us to Husserl's idea of "truly existing things," which include two aspects:

- Conformity to the laws of reality, or the "internal horizon" of things, and
- Self-givenness, meaning characterized to consciousness as "itself-there."[17]

The self-consciousness of transcendence emerges over time, hence temporality acts as a handmaiden to *Alethia*, arising within the stream of time and which thereby provides a bridge to William James' pragmatic conception of truth.[18] For James, religion becomes salient for those who recognize there is evil in the world and hope to stave off a divided self whereby temptations of the world threaten to lead the damaged self into darkness. The good self believes in the soteriology of whatever organized religions appeal to the senses; hence salvation is an essential element in the stream of perceptions and activities for true believers of a faith. This provides inner unity and peace, thereby fulfilling a major function of religion, namely tension management.[19] This tension management function of religion in general, and soteriology in particular, plays an explicit role in the analytical scheme of Talcott Parsons.[20]

This stream of consciousness occurs over time; hence temporality is the obdurate background, the essential grounding, of all things. How do we get from the essence of this thing to the perceiver, to consciousness? For Husserl, the problem of the being of transcendental subjectivity be-

17 James G. Hart, *The Person and the Common Life* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), 385.

18 William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909).

19 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985 [1902]), 139-160.

20 For more on Parsons, see James Chriss, "The Functions of the Social Bond," *Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2007):689-712; Jens Kaalhauge Nielsen, "Are there Cultural Limits to Inclusion? An Analysis of the Relation between Culture and Social Evolution in Talcott Parsons' Theory." In G. Pollini and G. Sciortino (eds.), *Parsons'* The Structure of Social Action *and Contemporary Debates* (Milan: FrancoAnegeli, 2001), 213-230; and Bruce Wearne, *The Theory and Scholarship of Talcott Parsons to 1951: A Critical Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

comes central. The self becomes an object of reflection, whenever and always, regarding the perception of phenomena in the world. It is the fulfilled consciousness of the pure ego.[21]

The synthesis of time-consciousness occurs when and as the ego constitutes itself through reflecting on things that come to the attention of consciousness (including oneself as object). But how does, or can, the self—as transcendental ego—become objective for itself? Can ego catch itself red-handed, positing itself? Isn't this subjectivity, not objectivity?[22] Subjectivity is *das Ich* according to Husserl. In the reflective act there is a gap between the objective and subjective poles, but it is not seen or understood in the moment of reflection, as this unfolds over time. The object of reflection is indeed manifest, and then the subjective pole kicks in with higher-level reflection as subject on the object of reflection.[23] Eventually in this series of reflections over time the sought-for ego itself—*es selbst*—becomes manifest.[24]

Hegel 1.0

For better or worse, much of this is derived from the phenomenology of Hegel.[25] According to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy is the activity of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts.[26] But unlike the ancient Greeks of Plato's time, who believed that concepts were essences which were already formed and simply awaiting discovery, Deleuze and Guattari, themselves influenced heavily by Hegel's notion of becoming, suggest that concepts are created. Philosophers must not only create concepts,

21 Chernyakov, *Ontology of Time*, p. 143.

22 Ibid., p. 151.

23 This is a strangely elliptical position of which I am not necessarily convinced. I maintain this discussion merely to illustrate Chernyakov's Hegel-inspired approach, even as my own belief in it is strained.

24 Chernyakov, *Ontology of Time*, p. 153.

25 Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977).

26 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2.

however; they also must make them convincing. Plato believed that Ideas (with a capital "I") appear on the scene out of the interplay of like-minded interlocutors who challenge each other's versions of reality (the original Greek dialectic), and out of this dialogical give-and-take emerges "truth." Yet, it was Hegel's innovation to borrow the structure of the Platonic dialectic and turn it into a new concept with a radically different agenda.

What was this agenda of Hegel's? Whereas Plato and modern science began by taking knowledge for granted—that is, that the experience of the senses leads ultimately to useful knowledge given the proper dialectical organizational structure—Hegel recognized that knowledge is at the same time both for itself and for another. Stated differently, Hegel posited the dual being of consciousness, a unity bifurcated, underlying all phases of his own dialectic. For example, simultaneously knowledge is grounded in objectivity (sense-certainty) and in intersubjectivity (perception). The structure of consciousness, then, is a dialectical movement. This means that truth is neither objective nor subjective, but merely appearance. The "notion" emerges out of this play of forces, that is, the dialectic that begins with sense-certainty and perception and is synthesized as force and knowledge. This is clearly a radical form of idealism, as Hegel argues for the non-empirical origins of force and knowledge.

The first phase of movement of Universal Spirit is the origin of cognition or sense perception. Hegel critiques the instrumentalist theory of cognition handed down from Augustine through Descartes and proceeds to deconstruct the *Cogito*. Indeed, the beginning and end of the medieval period are bookmarked by two statements of self or consciousness, whereby Augustine argued "I think therefore God is," while Descartes argued "I think, therefore I am."[27]

The history of Spirit begins with the appearance of knowledge; however, phenomenal knowledge taken as truth leads to the discovery of the untruth of knowledge, consistent with Plato's discovery of inward knowledge construed as untruth. In the dialectical movement from the-

27 Anne Fremantle, *The Age of Belief: The Medieval Philosophers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 23.

sis to antithesis to synthesis, we have phenomenal knowledge => untruth of phenomenal knowledge => doubt or skepticism. What is the genesis of this doubt? Hegel affirms it is not Cartesian doubt (the self-conscious scientific stance of empiricism that coincides with the birth of the Enlightenment), but the doubt of individual skepticism, personified in later ideas such as Sartre's existential doubt or Nietzsche's contemplative despair of the death of truth or even the death of God. The dialectics of existential phenomenology unfold according to individualism (skepticism) => mass opinion (collectivism) => higher skepticism. From this perspective, for example, nihilism is one of the stages of natural consciousness.

The goal, then, is to understand how our knowledge conforms to what is, that is, to what is real, to truth (*Alethia*). Leaving it to opinion, to someone else's knowledge, is not sufficient. However, the nihilism of nothingness is not the answer either, whether of individual conviction or mass illusion. In this project of the crisis of knowledge, Hegel attempts to rescue both knowledge and cognition. The death of God is a new phase, or a new form, of this negation which even so does not equate with nothingness. Even though the now appears to have slipped away, something else is there, and it, too, will go through the same process of negation in the unfolding of the Spirit. In other words, the negative is doing work.

Hegel 1.1

Hence, we have appearance and the supersensible world. This is, in effect, the untruthing of both sense-certainty and perception. As the untruthing of perception makes perception inessential, so it is that through untruthing of sense-certainty you discover the unknowability of the essential. Both movements exhaust themselves. Any given attempt to grasp truth passes through different kinds of characteristic ways of striving to grasp it. They all have half-lives. Sensible objects eventually fade away, and description becomes more abstract and more intellectual, that is, more supersensible or metaphysical.[28]

28 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutic Studies*. Trans. P.C. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976) and Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Cre-*

The first step of this new phase is knowledge for-another under sense-certainty, that is, knowledge directed toward objects. Perception is knowledge directed toward oneself, or "knowledge for itself."[29] Both positions exhaust themselves into an irretrievable relativism, so what is the solution? To recognize that knowledge is at the same time both for-itself and for-another. This is the dual being of the essence of consciousness. It is a unity bifurcated, and this is the start of the synthesis.

This opens the phase of understanding, but ideas, thought, and perception do not magically work their effects in the world on their own. There must be some impetus, some animating thing or mechanism which is the force of ideas or perception. Again, Hegel starts with the observation that knowledge is grounded in both objectivity (sense-certainty) and intersubjectivity (perception), and that the structure of consciousness is a dialectic movement from which there is no resolving or escaping. Hegel nominates force for the movement of matter and ideas, that is, from both perception and sense-certainty views. Force later becomes the concept of power or the will (as in Schopenhauer). Indeed, force both causes (the active dimension) and is caused (the passive dimension), a conveniently plastic term for Hegel's purposes.[30] Force is the zone of indeterminacy which on both sides creates a caesura or splitting into essence and will, or between potential (*dynamis*) and action (*energeia*), which Agamben traces to Aristotle.[31]

The entire field is a play of force, that is, a field of sense-certainty and perception. This dialectic can be worked out via forces, which also means that they have no substance of their own. Consciousness is now ready to grasp the unconditional universal which is Notion. The Notion both causes force (expressed, active) and is caused by force (repressed, passive). This is radical idealism, which identifies the nonempirical ori-

ation of Hierarchy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).

29 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p, 79.

30 Ibid., p. 84.

31 Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*. Trans. D. Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

gins of both force and knowledge. Hegel states: From this we see that the Notion of Force becomes *actual* through its duplication into two Forces, and how it comes to be so. These two Forces exist as independent essences; but their existence is a movement of each towards the other, such that their being is rather a pure *positedness* or a being that is *posited by an other*, i.e. their being has really the significance of a sheer *vanishing*.[32]

Hegel 1.2

This vanishing leads to a higher level of ideality, namely sublation. The true essence of things is the notion of Force. The play of forces—the field which is Force—unfolds dialectically by way of understanding => appearances => inner world (of appearances). Here, the inner world for consciousness is a pure beyond, to the extent that consciousness does not yet find itself in it. It is a piece, a sublation, of the process of becoming toward the unitary universal of *Alethia*.[33] At the juncture of this supersensible world, truth is neither object nor subject, but appearance. The supersensible world is a kingdom of laws, and in this sense, law is merely another name for the play of forces. Hegel states: "…the *supersensible* world is an inert *realm of laws* which, though beyond the perceived world—for this exhibits law only through incessant change—is equally present in it and is its direct tranquil image."[34]

This supersensible world of laws organizes and regulates various areas of life, whether via the lawlike emanations of scriptural religions in the first instance, or the legislative, juridical, and executive activities of courts, governments, and bureaucracies in the second instance, with the latter borrowing from the former consistent with the thesis of political theology.[35] Nevertheless, Hegel contends that the basic structure of reality is the ideal to the extent that one cannot read off terms of the real

32 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 85.

33 Ibid., p. 88.

34 Ibid., pp. 90-91.

35 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]).

from the empirical sphere. This is because empirical reality is filtered through the senses (or the ideal sphere). Hence, even simple observation is dictated by ideal formations, even as Hegel warns that the ideal superstructure is not the same as Platonic forms. Rather than form per se, what is essential for Hegel is the pattern of movement, the becoming, which points to the dialectic as a gestalt conceptual framework.[36] This movement, this becoming, is essence incarnate, insofar as consciousness is the movement from nothing to nothing. Everything from beginning to end, from nothing to nothing bookended on both sides, is essence or becoming.[37] This indicates that, counterposed against Kant's liberal Protestantism, Hegel's dialect was modeled on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and hence moved in a more conservative direction even while paradoxically being structured within the radicalism of transcendental idealism.[38] Indeed, Hegel's romanticism converts the proclaimed reason and logic of the dialectic into revelation.[39]

Hegel argued that appearances are deceiving, and that vulgar empiricism (i.e., later versions of positivism from Comte and Spencer onward) cannot capture gestalt levels which produce either illusion (falsity) or deeper truths which require unearthing through archaeology, hermeneutics, semiotics, or structuralism generally. The meaning of a concept changes from the vantage point of various gestalts in that each view gives a different look or meaning. For Hegel, the gestalt represents different moments of consciousness. For example, what if I am despondent about something in my life, that I am being tempted

36 As developed and utilized here, gestalt in relation to Hegel comes primarily by way of Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), and Martin Heidegger, *Hegel*. Trans. J. Arel and N. Feuerhahn (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015).

37 Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 90.

38 See, e.g., D. Stephen Long, "Protestant Social Ethics." In C. Hovey and E. Phillips (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88-108, and Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1936).

39 Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 233.

to pursue lines of action that have been taught to me are deviant or sinful? My self-identification as a "good" person could then be threatened, and I may seek a remedy for this bad path. This could eventuate in connections with various of the helping professions whether of secular counseling or therapeutic services, or alternately those "physicians of the soul" embodied in priests who lead persons through an inerrant interpretation of scripture. Here religion, which previously was only of background or superficial interest in my cognitive schema, becomes a salient object of attention and becomes substantiated through a gestalt shift which connects the self to scriptural guidelines mediated through a priest and/or a supportive religious community (the congregation). This shift in cognitive framework could find support with further immersion in the belief system acting to reinforce the primary inkling that something is amiss in the world. For example, within the Christian faith, there could be commitment by the sinner to become baptized and thus able to take communion, which in turn allows one to partake of the mystical progression from substantiation to transubstantiation. Communion and other religious rituals provide transcendence whereby true believers escape the everyday life of the profane and are transported to the sacred which provides a glimpse of the divine.[40] Both Hegelianism and religion claim absolute truth, the first through speculation and the latter through revelation.[41]

Political Theology and Phenomenology

It is here that the concept of political theology again becomes relevant. There are secular versions of the mystical transubstantiation of bread and wine used in religious communion into the actual body and blood of Christ. In the Christian church, the ordained priest guides true believers through the daily Mass (the liturgy) and bestows sacraments (such as the taking of communion) according to scriptural conventions (outlined

40 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*. Trans. J. Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

41 Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "Hegel and Roman Catholicism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (4) (1992):673-691.

in a catechism). With regard to Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church, the priest is *Opus Dei*, that is, one who is sanctified and ordained to carry out the work of God through appropriate monastic training.[42] In delivering the liturgy to the congregation, the divine Word (the good news, the Gospel) is promulgated by the priest and the priest alone, as *Opus Dei*. As God's emissary, in his utterance of the liturgy the priest launches and sustains the divine gifts throughout the course of the Mass. These are, in effect, commands to bring one's life into accord with the teachings of the Church, paralleling the divine commandments of God (the "first movers") as interpreted through the disciples or as directly experienced or revealed (here, most importantly, Abraham and Moses in the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ in the New Testament).

As the priest is ordained to offer the body and blood of Christ (the Eucharist) to true believers through transubstantiation, the creation of political constitutions is one such version of secular transubstantiation.[43] A constitution represents the symbolic founding and beginnings of a nation, and that mere paper document is imbued with sacredness as it commands members of the political community across the generations to act in accordance with right living (as outlined in a body of laws derived from that constitution). Indeed, the Greek word *archē* means both "origin" and "command," and the *archōn* (the "one who begins") was the supreme magistrate in Athens.[44] In carrying the word across generations, origins (constitutions) and commands (priestly invocations) gear into the world in significant ways and provide the existential signposts by which living is made meaningful and ethical (if only aspirationally).

Existential phenomenology, too, talks about gearing into the world or, even better, gearing into a situation, to the extent that the self—the

42 Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*. Trans. A. Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013a), and Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*. Trans. A. Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013b).

43 Anne Norton, "Transubstantiation: The Dialectic of Constitutional Authority," *University of Chicago Law Review* 55 (2) (1988):458-472.

44 Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism*. Trans. A. Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

knowing and active subject—is always and intimately tied up with the resources (both material and ideational) at hand for a person within any particular strip of activity. There is no distance from the situation within which we currently find ourselves. Indeed, "We do not stand over against the situation; we are rather incorporated into it, attached to it, and we gear into it."[45] When Jehovah's Witnesses come to my door proselytizing their faith, they are inviting me into the Kingdom of God through the offering of pamphlets, invitations to upcoming conferences, and personal witness and testimony, all the while seeking to configure available resources toward the production of a new cognitive framework for persons within the immediate situation. Whether or not this proselytizing framework materializes or becomes salient for the persons being solicited, there is nevertheless the dramatic realization that cognition can be structured through missionary work, even if the person ultimately does not accept the offer and shrugs it off as the work of religious fanatics. This could possibly even have the effect of souring those being solicited on religion in general, although those committed to such proselytization believe the benefits of possible conversion of new recruits outweigh the costs of intrusion and, even on some occasions, the creation of newly emboldened nonbelief.[46]

Gurwitsch's "gearing into the situation" is of a piece with Husserl's *horizon*, whereby the intentionality of subjects within the moment or within a situation is merged into the fundamental continuity of the whole. This, again, is consistent with the Hegelian dialectic of the unfolding of the *Geist* in the production of human reality through the linking of consciousness, perception, thought, and action within the multiple and varied empirical settings in which human beings operate. The cultural horizon is the backdrop for all human strivings, constituting the unity of the flow of experience in both its subjective and objective aspects. As

45 Gurwitsch, *Human Encounters in the Social World*, p. 77.

46 For some data on the growth of membership in various religious organizations through missionary work and proselytization, see Ronald Lawson and Ryan Cragun, "Comparing the Geographic Distributions and Growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51 (2) (2012):220-240.

Gadamer notes, "For everything that is given as existent is given in terms of a world and hence brings the world horizon with it."[47] This is Jaspers' encompassing.

Hegel 1.3

The Hegelian dialectic must be extended further in order to account for the most mundane or profane of all forces in the universe, namely, desire. Again, we must trace the unfolding of the Geist from sense-certainty => perception => phenomenal consciousness, the latter of which is a simple universal which is both being in-itself and being for-another. This, in effect, leads to the collapse between the moment of sense-certainty and perception. The discovery of such simple universals leads to forces, which are actualized universals. Above or behind the play of forces is law, as in forces => law => infinity. It is within the synthetic movement from law to infinity that desire is unleashed or realized. Self-consciousness also emerges in the movement from sense and perception, and it is essentially the return from otherness. There is a split or a division, or as in later parlance, alienation, the latter of which was a prominent feature of the materialism of Marx and Engels.[48] In the first moment, self-consciousness is pure consciousness insofar as the entirety of the sensuous world is preserved for it. A second distinct moment is the unity of self with otherness, which represents the unity of self-consciousness with itself. This becomes an enduring existence which is appearance, which immediately raises the antithesis of appearance and its truth. Nevertheless, this unity of self-consciousness with itself is desire in general. Desire represents a double perception which has the character of a negative. As Hegel states: "But *for us*, or *in itself*, the object which for self-consciousness is the negative element has, on its side, returned

47 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised ed. Trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000), 245.

48 For a discussion of the influence of Hegel on Marx regarding alienation, derived from the negative absolute and splitting of human consciousness across the dialectic, see Mark Worrell and Dan Krier. "Atopia Awaits! A Critical Sociological Analysis of Marx's Political Imaginary," *Critical Sociology* 44 (2) (2018):213-239.

into itself, just as on the other side consciousness has done. Through this reflection into itself the object has become Life."[49]

Here, in the movement from desire to life, is another version of the movement from self to other. I am a desiring other that moves out into phenomenality, that is, outwards toward desire. But the other is always my own self-consciousness divided against itself. The unfolding of the Geist continues on in the form of desire => life => spirit, and spirit is the synthetic apperception of desire and life, yet at this point spirit is an empty universal. How do we move from simple to actualized universal? One way this is done is in the movement from spirit (simple universal) to master (actualized universal) and then to slave, the latter of which represents mutual recognition between master and slave. This is the pure Notion of recognition, namely, "…the duplicating of self-consciousness in its oneness" which "…appears to self-consciousness."[50] Hence, recognition is the process of history. Master-slave or lord-bondsman is the dialectic from which intersubjectivity or mutual recognition springs. This idea is easily extended into the transcendental-existential dilemma of humanity seeking to understand that which is beyond itself, and once positing the existence of infinite beings there is a possibility of mutual recognition which reaches out to the cosmos and beyond to make sense of life, desire, and other worldly events and processes.

Left to its own devices, the master-slave dialectic will generate a synthesis culminating in a critique, that being a concern with equity in that lords are perpetually and nonnegotiably master over bondsmen, even as history begins with the mutual recognition emerging from that dialectic. One way of solving this dilemma is within the intellectual sphere, such as the Kantian notion of a Categorical Imperative whereby persons are directed to treat persons as ends never as means. This "kingdom of ends" is one version of the teleology of the growth of human reason and enlightenment toward the realization of the just society.[51]

49 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 106.

50 Ibid., p. 112.

51 Stefan Bird-Pollan, "Hegel's Grounding of Intersubjectivity in the Master-Slave Dia-

In addition, as they have evolved over time, most established religions have attempted to describe their lords not only as all-powerful and omniscient, but also as caring, compassionate, and beneficent. Especially since the Middle Ages there has been an ongoing "domestication of the divine" whereby religion positions itself as the place of rest and repose from the troubles and turmoil of the flesh and the world.[52] Religion emerged especially as a way of dealing with and ameliorating earthly passions and desires—especially those of the flesh—which became increasingly problematized and pathologized with the rise of psychiatry and the human sciences.[53]

Especially with regard to Judeo-Christian religious values in western society, there was an ambivalence toward earthly pleasures, especially those of sex and the accumulation of wealth. One of the evolutionary achievements of Christianity which led to its growth and institutionalization was overcoming this early ambivalence, which included solutions such as the vow of chastity within the clergy and the legitimation of the human family where now sex among couples married in a church ceremony is viewed as legitimate so long as the procreative intent was evident.[54] From the very beginning, religion has been about social control, specifically about subduing the passions of individuals which are viewed as potentially damaging to the collectivity. Lester Ward put it well when he wrote that "Suffice it to say that the mission of religion was to restrain the will. It represented the race and the future; it denied the claims of *feeling*; it demanded sacrifice. It may be called the *social instinct*."[55]

As secular and medical discourses of sexual perversion emerged there was an acquiescence of sorts from the pulpit whereby priests remind-

lectic," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 38 (3) (2012):237-256.

52 Richard Wentz, "The Domestication of the Divine," *Theology Today* 57 (1) (2000):24-34.

53 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

54 Talcott Parsons, "Religious and Economic Symbolism in the Western World," *Sociological Inquiry* 49 (2-3) (1979):1-48.

55 Lester F. Ward, "The Essential Nature of Religion," *International Journal of Ethics* 8 (2) (1898):185.

ed true believers that God was good but that those wayward souls who gave in to temptation would likely face the eternal flames of hell. This trick, of convincing true believers that their god was both powerful and good, that is, rewarding those whose behavior comports with teachings of the commandments while punishing those who stray, led Hegel to operate with a notion of Geist—a fundamentally religious concept—for resolving the "disharmonies" of Christianity, especially its subject-object confusion which leads to an incomplete and divided self.[56] Indeed, in an otherwise critical exposition of Hegel, Marx agrees with Hegel that man creates religion, and that this "other-worldly being"—this God—is nothing but the affirmation of man's own alienation.[57] Agamben, too, has argued that Hegel's dialectic is nothing more than a secularization of Christian theology. Indeed, there are scattered attempts to argue that a truly phenomenological undertaking which achieves the transcendental epoche is the theological writ large.[58] Heidegger's version of phenomenology and the attention he paid to theological writings—especially those of St. Paul—gives us a glimpse of this achievement.[59]

Agamben's Postsecularism

Agamben's forays into theology represent a kind of postsecularism, or as Dominick LaCapra has aptly described the more overtly deconstruction-

56 Robert Solomon, *From Hegel to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

57 Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right.'" In D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 29.

58 See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Trans. P. Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), and Adam Wells, *The Manifest and the Revealed: A Phenomenology of Kenosis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018).

59 Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Trans. M. Fritsch and J.A. Gossetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010). Heidegger was an assistant to Husserl at the University of Freiburg in 1916, and when Husserl was dismissed from the University in 1933, Heidegger took over as Rector. See Gabriel Ricci, "Husserl's Assistants: Phenomenology Reconstituted," *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010):419-426.

ist wing of this project in the hands of Derrida, as an atheistic theology.[60] Because Agamben's primary allegiance is to a philosophy and social theory born within modernity and the Enlightenment which guides observers of the social world along the paths of secularization and progress—even as counter movements such as postmodernism and postsecularism sprang from it, or somehow escaped its gravitational pull—Agamben can take a playful, irreverent, and even blasphemous attitude toward theological objects of inquiry.

From the perspective of the Hegelian dialectic, this would represent such movements of thought as premodernity => modernity => postmodernity or theological => secular => postsecular. Agamben's playfulness regarding theology shows up in such questions as "What was God doing before He Made heaven and earth?" and "What happened to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were expelled from it?"[61] And early in his career Agamben published a paper in Italian, the translated title of which is "The 121st Day of Sodom and Gomorrah," a playful response to Marquis de Sade's art-porn novel *120 Days of Sodom*.[62] Agamben wittingly or unwittingly, like everyone else, is the product of the unfolding of the *Geist*, and his work reflects an analytical sophistication with grounding in the classics—philosophy, philology, and theology—with a readiness to employ critical extensions in the guise of postmodernism, deconstruction, and of course postsecularism. This project also allows Agamben to straddle the transcendentalism of phenomenology proper with the immanence of the critical project from Marx, Benjamin, Schmitt, Foucault, and onwards. With Benjamin—from whom he draws for a great deal of his insights—Agamben learned about the possibility of suspending the dialectic, and this turns attention to the limit event or to zones of indis-

60 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

61 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 162, and Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Garden*. Trans. A. Kotsko (London: Seagull Books, 2020).

62 For a summary of this paper see Christian Grünnagel, "Marquis de Sade." In A. Kotsko and C. Salzani (eds.), *Agamben's Philosophical Lineage* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 193-200.

tinction.[63] Benjamin noted that Hegel's use of *aufheben* has a threefold meaning corresponding with the triadic structure of the dialectic, namely, to preserve, to elevate, and to cancel.[64] And as Agamben pointed out later, the suspension of the dialectic could be construed as the Pauline verb *katarēgsis*, a messianic suspension employed by John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, and others.[65]

This messianic suspension or even possibly elevation to a better state is the premier limit event and the cipher of Agamben's life's work, showing up for example in his study of the trial of Jesus Christ, the contradictions regarding the two kingdoms (drawn primarily from Augustine's defense of the city of God against the earthly city), bare life (*zoe*) versus political life (*bios*), and being versus acting (from Aristotle).[66]

Spencer and Arnold

In his paper "Ciphers of Transcendence," Andrew Hunt asked whether it is "possible to endure existentially at the limit of immanent thought and experience a momentary…"—and next, quoting from Jaspers—"*leap* beyond all objectivity."[67] This brings to mind the great debates over literature and science taking place during the Victorian Era between Matthew Arnold, representing poetry and religion, and Herbert Spencer, representing science and philosophy. It was the hard-nosed empiricist and evolutionist Spencer—to whom Darwin once referred as "our great phi-

63 Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence." In M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, vol. 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236-252.

64 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Trans. H. Zohn. H. Arendt (ed.). (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 208.

65 Agamben, *Time that Remains*, p. 99.

66 For these various points, see Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*; Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); James Chriss, *Law and Society: A Sociological Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2020a); and James Chriss, "Religion as Social Control: Parsons and Foucault," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 16 (7) (2020b):1-46.

67 Andrew Hunt, "Ciphers of Transcendence: Cognitive Aesthetics in Science," *Heythrop Journal* XLIX (2008):617, and Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, vol. 1. Trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 314.

losopher"—that grudgingly ceded ground to Arnold on the persistent and stubborn presence of the Unknowable even with the best efforts of science to describe, explain, and secure all that is Knowable.[68] Within the unknowable transcendence—Jaspers' encompassing—the positing of God as the unmoved mover could work as well as anything else, at the very least acting as a placeholder until definitive empirical evidence about the birth of the cosmos and the beginning of life is revealed.

Spencer's championing of immanence contrasted against Arnold's transcendence in Victorian England can be understood not only as a conflict between literature and science, but also as Spencer's attempt to expand the Knowable into realms which were not directly observable to the senses, that is, by way of the scientization of mind, personality, feelings, and subjectivity writ large. Spencer wrote an early and important treatise on *Principles of Psychology*, first published in 1855, while in the same year Scottish empiricist philosopher Alexander Bain published *Senses and the Intellect*. In addition, Bain founded *Mind*, the first English journal devoted to psychology and philosophy, the first issue of which was published in 1876.[69] In his prefatory remarks as journal editor in that first issue, Bain recommended that *Mind* would become a repository for the establishment and growth of the mental sciences, believing that the accumulated record of articles published there would document the movement toward the fulfillment of a scientific psychology.[70] It was also fitting that Spencer was bestowed the honor of writing the inaugural article for the journal, titled "The Comparative Psychology of Man," which was taken from a talk before the Anthropological Institute in June, 1875.[71]

However, this empiricist approach to mind represented by Spencer

68 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: Appleton and Co, 1865). For the Darwin quote, see Anthony Kearney, "Matthew Arnold and Herbert Spencer: A Neglected Connection in the Victorian Debate about Scientific and Literary Education," *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 28 (1) (2001):63.

69 Kate Harper, "Alexander Bain's *Mind and Body* (1872): An Underappreciated Contribution to Early Neuropsychology," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 55 (2) (2019):139-160.

70 Alexander Bain, "Prefatory Words," *Mind* 1 (1) (1876):1-6.

71 Herbert Spencer, "The Comparative Psychology of Man," *Mind* 1 (1) (1876):7-20.

and Bain in Britain and across western society was immediately challenged shortly after the launching of the journal. Indeed, from the 1880s through 1915 "Hegelian thought dominated the professional study of philosophy in Britain."[72] Defenders of Hegel would argue that the dialectical method in not necessarily antithetical to the scientific spirit of objectivity, especially in terms of Hegel's notion of Absolute Spirit which incorporates both objectivity and subjectivity in the production of social reality. Nevertheless, in the year 1902, an aging and infirm Spencer wrote to Bain to bemoan that *Mind* and other empirically-oriented psychology journals had been taken over by Hegelianism. As Spencer explained,

> I not unfrequently think of the disgust you must feel at the fate which has overtaken *Mind*. That you, after establishing the thing and maintaining it for so many years at your own cost, should now find it turned into an organ for German idealism must be extremely exasperating. …Oxford and Cambridge have been captured by this old-world nonsense. What about Scotland? I suppose Hegelianism is rife there also.[73]

Spencer explained psychological and sociological phenomena by way of the theory of evolution which did not require the positing of metaphysical or transcendental forces. Instead, biological and social phenomena were explained with recourse to evolution defined as "a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity, to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; through continuous differentiations and integrations."[74] That is to say, all phenomena available to the senses through careful and systematic inquiry, evolve from a low and simple state to an elevated and complex state which improves the fitness of the organism to changing or plastic environments over time. For example, in the lower animals there is a direct and unbroken movement from a stimulus to physical excitement or muscle movement, that is, the simple reflex action. The higher or-

72 Kirk Willis, "The Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain, 1830-1900," *Victorian Studies* 32 (1) (1988):85-111, 86.

73 Quoted in David Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, vol. II (New York: Appleton, 1908), 201.

74 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 216.

ganisms, culminating in the human being, have developed emotions and other elements that work in combination between stimulus and reaction. As Spencer explains,

> The primitive man, idly inclined, and ruled by the sensations of the moment, will not exert himself until actual pains have to be escaped; but the man somewhat advanced, able more distinctly to imagine future gratifications and sufferings, is prompted by the thought of these to overcome his love of ease: decrease of misery and mortality resulting from this predominance of the representative feelings over the presentative feelings.[75]

In this way, Spencer is able to derive cultural innovations such as morality from the physical realities of sentient beings who over time are better able to adapt to their environments and to foresee longer-term consequences of action. Indeed, modern notions of citizenship and adjusting to the requirements of living peaceably among others represent an advancement over more primitive states of human existence. Spencer noted that "men who dwell only in the present, the special, the concrete—who do not realize with clearness the contingencies of the future—will put little value on those rights of citizenship which profit them nothing, save as a means of warding off unspecified evils that can possibly affect them only at a distant time in an obscure way."[76] This also explains why the history of early societies is typified by harsh and brutal punishments of misconduct: Among the more civilized "dread of a long, monotonous, criminal discipline may suffice," while for the less civilized "there must be inflictions of bodily pain and death."[77]

Hegel 1.4

In contrast to Victorian thought, Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness connects up with morality in ways largely antithetical to Spencer and

75 Herbert Spencer, *The Data of Ethics* (New York: Lovell, Coryell & Co, 1879), 122-123.

76 Herbert Spencer, "Prison-Ethics." In Spencer's *Essays: Moral, Political and Aesthetic* (210-250) (New York: Appleton, 1868), 216.

77 Ibid.

even Arnold. Hegel argues that morality possesses both transcendental and imminent features, that is, that the moral worldview has duty located in the beyond (e.g., duty to God and country), but also duties "demanded down here" (to friends, family, employers, and so forth).[78] Sometimes moral contradictions, such as deciding between duties to family and work wherever they may come into conflict, are cast off into a transcendent self-consciousness. But such a move alienates and empties the immanent work that morality does, and in order to move to absolute validity one must recognize the contingency of self-consciousness. Here Hegel is rejecting a one-sided idealism insofar as the subjective and objective aspects of self-consciousness are twin-born to the extent that self-consciousness is always a form of life, that is, as embodied in real flesh-and-blood human beings.[79] It is through the dialectic where the meeting ground between the universal and specific is found.

Conscience, then, is morality become complete. This represents a balancing act between general standards—of nature and law, for example—and the stream of activities directly experienced in the here and now. Stated a bit more carefully, duty is never contrasted with reality, for doing so would equate to a vulgar playing off of objectivity and subjectivity against each other. As Hegel states, "Conscience does not oppose to itself an alien Nature subject to independent laws."[80] As opposed to Rousseau's notion of the general will, Hegel argues that the content of conscience is in essence arbitrary, and that it is not defensible to argue that one's actions should have been directed to the general good rather than an individual or specific good based upon utility or some other value. However, to escape this utilitarian trap of the randomness of ends, Hegel argues that conscience has no content. Rather, in the moment of self-consciousness, the individual must decide whether to obey or disobey any law, or whether or not to kowtow to the dictates of a perceived

78 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 572.

79 Lucien Ionel, "Self-Consciousness as a Living Kind: On the Fourth Chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*," *Hegel Bulletin* 42 (1) (2021):77-95.

80 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 573.

moral universe. This particular dialectical movement can be described as consciousness => self-consciousness => reason.[81] And even as Hegel was at loggerheads with Kierkegaard over the role of faith and reason in the human condition, they both agreed that "individual subjectivity has a right to its satisfaction."[82]

There are bridges between immanence and transcendence, and one of them is language, which Hegel describes as "the medium in which Spirit or social subjectivity exists." Persons in communication can transcend individual subjectivity and, in the process, acknowledge others as fellow human beings.[83] And further, "To follow conscience is to practice a religion of self-worship."[84] Even so, this "lonely religion" is communal even as it is a cypher of self-consciousness. There is a tension between the acting individual based upon this self-worship and the universal judgment of the broader community. In this liminal space between judges of morality on the one hand, and individual action and will born of self-conscience on the other, Absolute Spirit shows itself. Further, this antagonism between pure duty and potentially tainted individual actions amounts to "two sides of the same Notion in seeming opposition."[85]

Hegel states, "Hitherto in Consciousness, Self-consciousness, Reason, and Spirit there have been manifold consciousnesses of the Absolute. The Absolute Being has not, however, been aware of *itself* in them."[86] But how could Hegel know this, and how does the dialectical logic brought to bear on all this give him warrant for such an assertion? Yes, we have seen earlier that the supersensible world of the intellect moves beyond sense data and creates analytical spaces that travel out into transcendence, and that science is a secular version of the Absolute. Later, Herbert Spencer

81 Ernst Bloch, "The Dialectical Method," *Man and World* 16 (1983):301.

82 David Sherman, "Absurdity." In H.L. Dreyfus and M.A. Wrathall (eds.), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (271-279) (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 272.

83 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 575.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid., p. 577.

86 Ibid.

turned this idea on its head, proclaiming that religion and theology stake a claim on the Unknowable while science deals with the Knowable.[87] In his defense, Hegel argues that the dialectic has multiple phases—examples of which we have dealt with throughout this discussion—and the stages which lead up to religion proper contain the previous shapes of Consciousness, Self-consciousness, Reason, and Spirit. That is to say, "In developed religion consciousness is self-consciousness, but not so at less developed stages."[88]Insofar as religion is concerned, the Absolute rises to self-consciousness in the pure medium of thought and can take a variety of immanent forms. Hegel gives examples of these, and the starting point is always consciousness moving to self-consciousness and eventually to the Absolute. The first is natural religion, or specifically natural theology and the argument from consciousness in relation to it.[89] For example, a purely physicalist or materialist framework cannot explain how consciousness sprung from non-consciousness, and perhaps there is some still unknown set of stages or mental properties which emerge in a particular order giving rise to consciousness in the first place. And although Moreland does not deal directly with Hegel, it appears that everything leading up to Hegel's discussion of the Absolute is asking the same sort of questions. Even so, we can acknowledge that Moreland's own understanding of natural theology would not embrace Hegel's Absolute Idealism.[90]

87 Spencer, *First Principles*.

88 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 578.

89 Here Hegel refers only to natural religion, but it is not a stretch to discuss natural theology in the same breath, the latter of which employs reason and natural sense perception, rather than mysticism or revelation, to explain the existence of God. See J.P. Moreland, "The Argument from Consciousness." In W.L. Craig and J.P. Moreland (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (282-343) (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Abraham Kuyper argues that even as Hegel did not recognize a natural theology explicitly, he nevertheless implies that a "general human sense" can come to realize under what conditions Absolute Spirit receives knowledge of itself. See Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*. Trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (New York: Scribner's, 1898), 312.

90 See, e.g., Paul Capetz, "What Every Beginning Student Needs to Know about Nineteenth-Century Protestant Theology," *Religion Compass* 2 (6) (2008):961-978.

The second form of religion discussed by Hegel is the Persian God of Light, namely, the pantheism of Zoroastrian spirituality which posits light as both divine and natural.[91] This represents an important diremption, whereby by the light sense-certainty is assured, delivering mastery of immanence regarding all that is knowable (oddly, here, turning Spencer on his head). It is at this point that Spirit makes natural objects divine.[92] Even so, the Absolute does not yet glimpse itself, rather seeing itself only in the myriad human forms available to the senses by the light of day. The third form extends this idea from human beings to plant and animal life which is attributable to Indian Hinduism. This movement of Spirit now sees itself as an artificer working behind objects and animating them. The Absolute does not yet see itself but moves toward a preliminary understanding of self through the work it does on natural objects. Whereas the key element in the movement of Spirit under Zoroastrianism was sense-certainty, under Hinduism it is perception in terms of self's relation to external actuality.[93]

After Spirit reaches the stage of artificer (particularly with respect to Egypt) it can then move on to the artistic stage, represented most directly in Greece's religion of art. Hegel (1977, p. 580) states that, at this stage, Spirit "creates a product in which its own self-consciousness is manifest."[94] Here Spirit detaches itself from custom and the happiness and security flowing from it, and toward the more precarious, new forms of life which give rise to true art. Here, the full flowering of individuality and personality, along with awareness of one's sensuous presence, takes hold. For awhile individual artists are revered as gifted, but this eventually gives way in turn to the abstract work of art with the growth of Spirit's self-consciousness. The typical form

91 Mohammad Azadpur, "Hegel and the Divinity of Light in Zoroastrianism and Islamic Phenomenology," *Classical Bulletin* 83 (2) (2007):227-246.

92 Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 545.

93 Jon Stewart, "The Architectonic of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (4) (1995):747-776.

94 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 580.

produced in this next stage of art-religion are idealized human forms (sculpture being the prominent art) whereby natural existence is united with self-conscious Spirit.[95] This is represented in the Greek Pantheon, the birth of the gods.

Conclusion

Hegel's Absolute seems to be the eternal infinitude of which religion stakes a claim to recognition and interpretation. Understood in this way, it occupies the same region of Spencer's Unknowable. Indeed, Spencer grudgingly acknowledges that "our experience of the relations of Matter, Motion, and Force…are but symbols of the Unknown Reality."[96] And further, Spencer cautions that "…while the connection between the phenomenal order and the ontological order is forever inscrutable; so is the connection between the conditioned forms of being and the unconditioned form of being, forever inscrutable."[97]

For example, does Hegel's dialectic churn on forever and eternally, or does it find a final resting spot? It seems the unfolding of the Geist does have an endpoint, and this is God, love, and freedom (*Alethia*). Yet, this is little more than standard religious—but also phenomenological-existential—sentiments concerning connections between the Absolute or infinite, on the one hand, and the finite on the other. This sublation exhausts both transcendence and immanence. The Community of Man and the Community of God are implicated in each other, similar of course to Augustine's City of Man and City of God. It may not be preposterous to agree with Anselm Min that "…the dichotomy of transcendence and immanence is not absolute but only relative, secondary, and derived from the more primordial unity of God and the world."[98]

95 Ibid., p. 581.

96 Spencer, *First Principles*, p. 501.

97 Ibid., p. 502.

98 Anselm Min, "Hegel's Absolute: Transcendent or Immanent?" *Journal of Religion* 56 (1) (1976):86.

It is very strange, in the end, that Hegel's thought boils down to a kind of Christian ontotheology. Spencer may have arrived at the same point, but he maintained a sober scientific perspective because of the way the Unknowable replaces any talk of God. For those of us committed to the ideal of science, the latter is decidedly more palatable.

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Adorno's Insights in the Light of *Exakte Phantasie*

Alžběta Dyčková[1]

Abstract: This article aims to provide an elaboration of Theodor Adorno's notion of exact fantasy and its function within his idea of genuine philosophical thought. It is divided into two main parts. In the first one, I explore the features of the notion of fantasy through a comparison of its understanding in Walter Benjamin's and Adorno's bodies of work. I further explicate what features Adorno takes over from Benjamin and where the authors' ideas diverge. I present the role of fantasy in Adorno's thought as a non-transparent and emotional element of thinking that is responsible for the active arrangement of elements into constellations, which his individual essays are the embodiment of. In the second part, I follow Adorno's criticism of the situation of late capitalist society in the light of the feature of lack of fantasy that is according to him caused by the influence of modern mass culture. I put this feature in connection to his examination of the phenomenon of boredom, depicting fantasy as an intellectual faculty which enhances intellectual freedom and resists the "neurotic feelings" inherent in boredom. In the conclusion, I try to defend the possibility of the validity of Adorno's insights despite their unconcealed intellectual elitism.

Theodor Adorno did not comprehensively elaborate the concept of fantasy; at least not in the wholesome manner in which he described other concepts crucial for him, such as freedom or negativity. The notion of fantasy emerges and vanishes – not coincidentally in a sort of Proustian manner – throughout his oeuvre without explicit clarification of its meaning and connection to Adorno's general theory. Nevertheless, we can safely deduce that fantasy, namely exact fantasy, plays a crucial role in his ideas about the liberation of philosophical contemplation.[2] The

1 Alžběta Dyčková is a Ph.D. candidate at Charles University, Prague. Her current research focuses on the reconstruction of Adorno's philosophy of language.

2 As we will see further, interpretation of Adorno's understanding of fantasy circles around his inspiration and development of ideas of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin nevertheless made a distinction between "fantasy" (*Phantasie*) and the traditional term "imagination" (*Einbildungskraft*). He abandoned the term *Einbildungskraft* as he shift-

scarcity of Adorno's remarks also allows us to take an overall look at this problem and to glimpse the notion of exact fantasy in the various facets that Adorno fragmentary lends it throughout his work. I will focus on highlighting several concrete notions in Adorno's thinking in which fantasy plays a crucial role; namely emotionality of thought, thought's non-transparency to itself, the creation of constellations, boredom as a result of lack of fantasy and intellectual freedom as a resistance to it. It is pertinent to note that the issue of fantasy in Adorno's thought is not exhausted by these aspects, as we also encounter it in his insights about the process of artistic creation.[3] I leave these aspects aside here though, focusing mainly on fantasy's role in Adorno's idea of philosophical thought (which is, nevertheless, in the end also occupied with interpretation of art).

This paper's objective is therefore to deal in depth with Adorno's notion of exact fantasy, while occasionally referencing to few details of other discussions. In the first part of this text, I will attempt to explicate what nature and function Adorno ascribes to fantasy. I will shortly talk about Benjamin's idea of fantasy, as Adorno's conception is directly inspired by it in many of its central features. I will point out the areas in which Adorno takes over the insights from Benjamin as well as those where Adorno develops his ideas and eventually takes a different path when it comes to the introduction of the concept of fantasy. Both Benjamin and Adorno polemize with the Kantian understanding of the imaginative faculty of our thinking, nevertheless, each of the thinkers deals with it differently. In the second, slightly shorter, section, I will try to explicate Adorno's remarks on the notion of the lack of deployment of fantasy in thinking

ed from Kant's understanding of it and presented a fairly different concept. This endeavour despite their later differences remains common to Benjamin and Adorno. Therefore, I will use the term "fantasy", used in the English translation of *Actuality of Philosophy*, even though most of the English translations of Adorno's work as well as secondary literature about Adorno's aesthetics translates *exakte Phantasie* as "exact imagination".

3 For thorough elaboration on the problem of fantasy within Adorno's aesthetic insights see S. W. Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work, on Adorno's Aesthetics.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997).

and its connection to intellectual freedom. I will take into consideration external symptoms of boredom that Adorno marks as a consequence of a lack of fantasy. At the end of this text, I will consider the intellectual elitism of Adorno's conception and try to defend the possibility of seeing his general conception as worthwhile even so.

The notion of fantasy between Benjamin and Adorno

For Benjamin, the idea of fantasy is intertwined with the notion of learning from experience. This learning lies primarily in our ability to work with our experiences and gain the truth from discontinuity that transcends the unity of a medium without disrupting it.[4] Truth, for Benjamin, does not find its expression in a single medium and is not indifferent to various possible ways of perceiving reality. In such a framework, fantasy then plays a crucial role in our understanding of reality, even though it does not necessarily find its ultimate expression in conceptual language. It rather plays the role of a means that, once applied to the way in which we approach the world, gets us closer to truth through the nature of the perspective it provides. Benjamin describes it as a de-formative capacity that "plays a game of dissolution with its forms. The world of new manifestations that thus comes into being as the result of this dissolution of what has been formed has its own laws, which are those of the fantasy. Its supreme law is that, while the fantasy de-forms, it never destroys."[5] Benjamin sees the possibility to perceive the truth in glimpsing it in the fissures of reality. De-forming power of fantasy and its deployment in our experiencing of the world then may provide a key to encountering these fissures. In other words, we learn how to experience the fissures in reality by employing the de-formative power of fantasy in our approach to the world. As we will see further, Adorno dispatches from some crucial aspects of this idea, nevertheless, akin to Benjamin he understands

4 Comp. M. Ritter, "What Does the Rainbow Tell?" *Svět literatury*, vol. 54, (2016): 28-35, 28.

5 W. Benjamin, "Imagination." In *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 280. "Imagination" from the original translation has been replaced by "fantasy".

fantasy as something that eludes a purely conceptual and rational approach to the world and appears as something that is felt rather than rationally approached through linguistic means.

According to Benjamin, human beings learn from fantasy in a way that is similar to children's specific perception of colours, namely through gaining a perception that is "single, not as a lifeless thing and a rigid individuality but … a winged creature that flits from one form to the next one."[6] In that lies one of the main features that Adorno takes over from Benjamin, praising that "for him, philosophical fantasy is the capacity for ‚interpolation in the smallest', and for him, one cell of reality contemplated outweighs … the rest of the whole world."[7] Paying attention to detail, instead of attempting to create a philosophical construction that would explain the whole and instead of reducing the insight gained from the observation of a particular object to a principle, later becomes one of the fundamental elements of Adorno's essayistic form.[8] Focus on the detail is a necessary implication of another main feature of the essay, namely its focus on what is transient and ephemeral that is to be sought precisely in individual details, not in a whole. This second feature also comes from Benjamin's understanding of fantasy, as according to him, fantasy mediates what is transient and ephemeral. Fantasy's "de-formation shows further … the world caught up in the process of unending dissolution; and this means eternal ephemerality."[9]

Both Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas of fantasy arise, apart from an undoubted portion of philosophical intuition, from delineation from Kant's idea of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). Neither of them advocates any of the classifications of fantasy or imagination coming from the philosophical tradition, especially when it comes to how it has been considered by

6 W. Benjamin, "A Child's View of Color." In *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, 50.

7 T. W. Adorno, "Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*." In *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*. (Columbia University Press, 1992), 222-223.

8 Comp. T. W. Adorno, "Essay as a Form." In *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*. (Columbia University Press, 1991), 22.

9 W. Benjamin, "Imagination." In *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, 281. Comp. Adorno, "Essay as Form", 10.

the philosophical psychology of medieval and enlightenment philosophers. Benjamin builds his understanding of fantasy through a rejection of Kant's idea of learning.[10] Adorno, however, does not find Benjamin's approach dialectical enough and provides his own criticism of Kantian understanding of the imaginative faculty of our thinking.

> "In the most profound concept of transcendental epistemology, the concept of productive imagination, the trace of the will invades the pure intellective function. Once that has happened, spontaneity is curiously skipped in the will. (…) This explains the distortion as well as its [idealism's] proximity to the true facts."[11]

Spontaneity is here understood as an impulsive element of fantasy which we could even understand as a sort of instinctive momentum. Idealism tries to avoid admitting fantasy unpredictability, unreliability, and irrationality which, according to Adorno, is inseparable from it. Thinking that is too afraid of aspects that prevent it from the desired self-transparency then results in a reason that is "reduced to an instrument and assimilated to its functionaries, whose power of thought serves only the purpose of preventing the thought. Once the last trace of emotion has been eradicated, nothing remains of thought but absolute tautology."[12]

Adorno ascribes to the fantasy, as he understands it, an element that he believes to have been denied to it by traditional philosophy: emotionality. Emotionality is a physical impulse contained in fantasy.[13] Claiming that "faculties, having developed through interaction, atrophy, once they are severed from each other" Adorno, points out that traditional thinking has dismissed the emotional element of fantasy and through that, it created the "resulting intellectual asthma."[14] According to Adorno "each

10 I will not widely describe this issue here, as it has been already well described. See E. Friedlander, "Learning from the Colors of Fantasy." *boundary 2*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2018): 111-137, 115-116.

11 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 230.

12 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia.* (London: Verso, 2005), 123.

13 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 241.

14 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 123.

stirring of fantasy" is "engendered by desire which, in displacing the elements of what exists, transcends it without betrayal."[15] Philosophical thinking should use this genuine fantasy and include its dismissed emotional element in itself. Philosophical contemplation can never remain untouched by emotionality.

This is not a mere theoretical critical construct of Adorno's thinking. His own philosophical motivations can be scarcely read as not carrying any emotional charge. After all, any philosophy contemplating about the possibility of philosophy after Auschwitz can hardly lack emotional momentum. One of Adorno's most quoted passages talks about "philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair"[16] and his texts are interspersed with mentions of philosophical longing for reconciliation and redemption. Nevertheless, it is not only Adorno's philosophical motivation that is emotional. Adorno claims that thinking has to include its own impulses that have been both "preserved and surpassed".[17] Also, Adorno's texts are based on the methodology he himself sets out for textual composition and therefore they can serve as examples of the application of thinking that operates with fantasy's impulses.

In summary, both Adorno and Benjamin reject attempts to situate fantasy within the hierarchical framework of philosophical psychology, as we know them from Aristotle, Hume, or Kant. According to Adorno and Benjamin, such constructions do not describe or define fantasy in a meaningful way that would approach its complex functions and boundaries that eludes any exhausting explanation. Instead of these attempts to create a system describing individual potencies of the human mind and schematically explaining how their cooperation results with insight, Adorno points out that not only can we not completely understand how our mind works, but we should not even attempt. Complete transparency of thinking itself is not only impossible, but it is also not desirable. His reaction to the tradition is that instead of further clarifying or settling the

15 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122.

16 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

17 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122.

notion of fantasy, he re-problematizes and blurs it, claiming that this is precisely the position that fantasy should occupy within our thought if it is to be anyhow useful within philosophical contemplation; at least when it comes to the task he imposes on it.

The role of fantasy for Adorno nevertheless extends beyond the fact that he uses it to present the negative dialectical turn that would justify the non-transparency of thinking to itself. Fantasy plays a crucial role in the basis of his philosophical programme.

> "Fantasy … can establish that relation between objects which is irrevocable source of all judgement: should fantasy be driven out, judgement too, the real act of knowledge, is exorcised. But the castration of perception by a court of control that denies it any anticipatory desire, forces it thereby into a pattern of helplessly reiterating what is already known."[18]

To understand this peculiar mention from *Minima Moralia,* we will have to shortly return to the crucial passages of one of his earlier methodological texts, namely his inaugural lecture at the Frankfurt university in 1931.

> "One may see here an attempt to re-establish that old concept of philosophy … that of the *ars inveniendi*. … the *organon* of this *ars inveniendi* is fantasy. An exact fantasy [*exakte Phantasie*]; fantasy which abides strictly within the material which the sciences present to it and reaches beyond them only in the smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects, granted, which fantasy itself must originally generate."[19]

Exakte Phantasie is here presented as a crucial element of our thinking which enables the creation of constellations: configurations of concepts in whose texture we can glimpse important moments of the object, maybe even intellectual non-conceptual experience hidden in it. Here we get to the main role that fantasy plays in Adorno's thinking. That is how the aforementioned "relations between objects" declared in *Minima Moralia* are established. Exact fantasy's function is to take an active part in the creation of constellations as an organon of our thinking "which re-

18 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122-3.

19 T. W. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy." *Telos*, vol. 31 (1977): 122-133, 131.

arranges the elements of the question without going beyond the circumference of the elements."[20] That is then the main role of exact fantasy: it is a non-transparent emotionally charged element of our thinking that allows us to compose constellations in order to reveal the non-conceptual experiential content of the object under study, which are in Adorno's case mostly literary and musical works of art.

Essays are the constellations of concepts that Adorno seeks. In his later work, namely in his *Essay as Form*, the basic methodological building blocks of the essay are directly laid. The role of fantasy remains central. Nevertheless, we learn nothing more elaborate directly about fantasy itself. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, Adorno's entire concept of constellation is not formal and its principles are impossible to be schematically explicated.[21] I believe that the same then applies to the crucial element of composing constellations, fantasy itself. In his well-known *Essay as Form* Adorno repeats in different words his previous idea, noting that "the objective wealth of meanings encapsulated in every intellectual phenomenon demands of the recipient the same spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is castigated in the name of objective discipline",[22] however, he does not directly reveal more about how fantasy concretely works with the given material and selects and rearranges its elements into a constellation that would express the desired insights; such explication in the light of the essayistic method does not even seem to be possible or desired. This is where Adorno leaves us when it comes to the function of fantasy within philosophical contemplation aiming at the representation (*Darstellung*) of intellectual experience. It is impossible to proceed further in clarifying the precise function of *exakte Phantasie* because, as was mentioned, transparency of our thinking is not desirable according to Adorno.

20 Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", 131.

21 S. Buck-Morss, *Origins of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 96.

22 Adorno, "Essay as Form", 4-5.

Adorno's idea of constellations is again directly inspired by Benjamin; it is an extension of his concept of the idea as a configuration from the introduction to the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. His essays are the articulations of Benjamin's "ideas" as constellations of elements in whose texture the truth, ephemeral and timely, is to become visible. The general features of their conceptions are almost identical. The role of fantasy within it is not, however. When it comes to the function and power of fantasy, a major difference arises between Adorno's and Benjamin's understandings. For Benjamin, genuine fantasy is not an active element of our thinking that would actively take part in the creation of constellations. Fantasy is a purely receptive, uncreative faculty for him.[23] According to Benjamin, fantasy is a de-forming passive power that is a genuine feature of our relating to reality while for Adorno it is rather an active feature of our thought *about* the reality that takes part in the creation of its representation within a constellation. Adorno's understanding of fantasy as an "anticipatory desire" suggests that fantasy cannot remain passive while confronted with an object of thinking. His introduction of *exakte Phantasie* as an organon of philosophical thinking attributes to it an active role in the generation of the constellations. As he states in his lecture *Actuality of Philosophy,* fantasy *originally generates* constellation's individual aspects. Hence, although Adorno purposely uses Benjamin's terminology, as far as the problem of fantasy is concerned, he significantly develops it and goes beyond Benjamin's original intention and his final idea differs from Benjamin's.

The problem of lack of fantasy

The notion of fantasy emerges briefly also in Adorno's insights into life in a late capitalist society. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer note that the enlightenment thinking's goal is to "dispel the myth, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge."[24] Some pages later the au-

23 W. Benjamin, "Aphorisms on Imagination and Color." In *Selected Writings: Volume 1 1913-1926*, 48.

24 T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, California: Stanford

thors add that "the technical facilitation of existence, the continuance of domination demands the fixation of instincts by greater repression" and that the fantasy then "withers".[25] These remarks lay the basis for another feature of fantasy we can observe in Adorno's texts, namely the issue of consequences of its ousting from thinking.

Adorno marks the lack of fantasy as a symptom of intellectually undesired practices of modern society in his essays about mass culture. Fantasy as an organon of gathering together "the discrete elements of the real into its truth" gets in the modern situation "repudiated as an improper presumption."[26] Products of mass culture do not require deployment of fantasy or any intellectually strenuous performance from its consumers and through their ubiquity, they even actively choke these faculties of the individuals. We encounter this for example in filmmaking:

> "Far more strongly than the theatre of illusion, film denies its audience any dimension in which they might roam freely in fantasy … without losing the thread; thus it trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality. The withering of fantasy and spontaneity in the consumer of culture today need not be traced back to psychological mechanisms. The products themselves, especially the most characteristic, the sound film, cripple those faculties through their objective makeup."[27]

In short, Adorno complains: "Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse."[28] He also marks the lack of fantasy as a source of the "neurotic feeling of powerlessness" that is "intimately bound up with boredom".[29] The problem is the following:

> "Fantasy is suspected of being only sexual curiosity and long-

University Press, 2002), 1.

25 Adorno, Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 27-28.

26 T. W. Adorno, "Scheme of Mass Culture." In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 64-65.

27 Adorno, Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 99-100. "Imagination" from the original translation has been replaced by "fantasy".

28 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 25.

29 T. W. Adorno, "Free Time." In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, 192.

> ing for forbidden by the spirit of a science which is no longer spirit. Those who want to adapt must learn increasingly to curb their fantasy. … The lack of fantasy which is cultivated and inculcated by society renders people helpless in their free time. The impertinent question of what people should do with the vast amount of free time now at their disposal … is based upon this very lack of fantasy."[30]

Adorno's criticism here aims at the fact that the modern way of life of western society, despite being filled with prosperity, carries within itself this germ of regression, or rather allows it to come into existence. He even marks it as the "reason why people have remained chained to their work, and to system which trains them for work, long after that system has ceased to require their labour."[31]

We can put these passages in direct connection with one of Adorno's observations in his *Minima Moralia*.

> "Few things separate more profoundly the mode of life befitting an intellectual from that of the bourgeois than the fact that the former acknowledges no alternative between work and recreation. … Its freedom is the same as that which bourgeois society reserves exclusively for relaxation and, by this regimentation, at once revokes. Conversely, anyone who knows freedom finds all the amusements tolerated by this society unbearable, and apart from his work, which admittedly includes what the bourgeois relegate to non-working hours as 'culture', has no taste for substitute pleasures."[32]

This point together with the former passages from the essays on mass culture implies that genuine intellectual life should, according to Adorno, resist the "neurotic feeling of powerlessness" concealed in boredom. Genuine intellectuals according to Adorno do not succumb to the way of life that leads to this masked feeling of desperation and we can assume that according to Adorno they simply should not experience a sense of boredom. They exercise the freedom understood as "that of a man pur-

30 Adorno, "Free Time", 192. The translation has been modified.

31 Adorno, "Free Time", 192.

32 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 130.

suing his own ends, ends that are not directly and totally exhausted by social ends."[33] This freedom Adorno observes both as an external feature of the way of leading one's life and his way of thinking and dealing with experiential material. Adorno claims that "the will without physical impulses, impulses that survive weakened, in fantasy, would not be a will"[34] and thereby stresses fantasy's importance for the exercising of intellectual freedom.

Adorno illustrates these reflections by claiming that one could hardly imagine "Nietzsche in an office, with a secretary minding the telephone in the anteroom, at his desk until 5 o'clock" and later "playing golf after the day's work was done."[35] He also complains in one of his lectures about freedom that he has to "perform too many administrative duties and these keep me from what I regard as my most important tasks, tasks I can find time for only by stealing time from unavoidable chores" marking it as "the concrete form in which we experience the question of freedom and unfreedom today."[36] Both of these images present examples of external unfreedom that according to Adorno genuine intellectuals should be able to resist better than others.

Concluding remarks

Adorno generally marks the ability to use fantasy as "bound up with educational privilege and leisure" belonging in its "pure form" rather to the "philosophical concept of art."[37] The picture Adorno sketches in this regard is undoubtedly one of the reasons why he is often accused of being a strong intellectual elitist. His idea of intellectual freedom that exercises genuine fantasy openly implies that it shall be a privilege of only a small group of individuals who possess certain intellectual background

33 Adorno, *Negative Dialectic*, 261.

34 Adorno, *Negative Dialectic*, 241. "Imagination" from the original translation has been replaced by "fantasy".

35 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 130.

36 Adorno, *History and Freedom Lectures 1964-1965* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 205.

37 Adorno, "Scheme of Mass Culture", 65.

and education as well as means to exercise them. The environment in which Adorno lived as well as the lives of intellectuals he admired – such as Kafka or Benjamin – probably explain the picture that Adorno sketches as well as the impressions from which it emerged.

It is uncertain whether Adorno would be willing to admit that his idea of fantasy and the account of freedom it helps to enact is achievable also for others than for such specific intellectuals. We can only hope for this on the basis that it explicitly pits intellectuals and bourgeoisie against each other, not intellectuals and all other people but this cannot be taken as any definitive proof. Casting Adorno a bit aside, it can be certainly argued that exercising this element of thinking may be rather bound with the existence of rich inner life, which depends rather on emotional maturity and ability of self-reflection than on intellectual background and education. Whether or not, Adorno's vision and analysis of the elements of modern western society can be extended in such a direction without significant withering of the original thesis. In other words, even though the elitism of the conception is undeniable, it is not its essential element.

Apart from this problem, Adorno's presentation of the issue of fantasy is generally ephemeral and at some moments problematic. He does not unravel its meaning within a clearer disquisition as he does with other concepts such as freedom. Adorno's reason for this course of action, as mentioned, is the idea of the undesirability of complete transparency of thought to itself. In this case, it is based on the idea of an alternative philosophical method whose essence does not lie in following cartesian rules of analysis, but instead, intuitively letting itself be led by its object, wherever the object takes it. His presentation of exact fantasy corresponds with the opaque nature he ascribes to it and therefore it eliminates the inner contradiction that would rise in the case of its comprehensive and schematic introduction. Fantasy cannot be schematically explained in depth once it is understood as an emotional and not fully classifiable feature of thought; we are to glance at its gist in the different facets it takes in various contexts in which we encounter it. This idea of Adorno's, as many others, carries one of the main qualities of his, and undeniably

also Benjamin's, thinking: constant notice that there is not necessarily one central correct way of philosophical thinking, which is a matter that in his view becomes even more vital under conditions of formal freedom.

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Utopian Promises and the Risk of Regression – Erich Fromm and the Future of Work

Stefan Sauer[1] *and Manuel Nicklich*[2]

Abstract: The discourse around digitalisation has become detached from the lived reality of the world of work. This discourse is dominated by vague, nebulous promises about new models of work on the one hand and dire warnings of a mass replacement of human labour on the other. Drawing on the work of Erich Fromm, we argue that this creates a risk of regression, as people turn to 'traditional' authority figures or a fatalistic solutionism that places unconditional faith in technology. We instead propose an alternative approach rooted in people's actual experiences that looks for ways that digital technology can be used to support and augment, rather than replace, human labour.

1. Introduction

If the discourse around digitalisation[3] is to be believed, (paid) work is changing more quickly than at any point in recent decades. In the discourse around digitalisation, we often hear about 'disruptive' processes such as a shift to agile, project-based work and a platform economy. Admittedly, unless you are very charitable about it, there is not yet much evidence of these changes (other than the upheavals caused by the Covid pandemic), but it is confidently predicted that they are just round the corner.[4] These predictions are closely bound up with utopian and dystopian

1 Stefan Sauer is professor for social research at the Kempten University of applied science. His main areas of research are sociology of work, methodology and critical theory.

2 Manuel Nicklich is sociologist and postdoctoral researcher at the Nuremberg Campus of Technology. He worked in several projects dealing with effects of technology on work.

3 We are aware that digitalisation is a rather ill-defined buzzword, used to refer to a whole host of different phenomena. However, since our intention is to develop a meta-perspective on the topic, we will not stipulate a narrower definition, but rather will take up the thread of existing discussions and debates about digitalisation.

4 Benedikt Hackl et al., *New Work: auf dem Weg zur neuen Arbeitswelt. Management-Impulse, Praxisbeispiele, Studien*. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017). Lothar Schröder, *Die*

visions of the future of (paid) work.[5] Although many of these ideas have so far only been talked about, such discourses can still have real-world consequences; for instance, they can influence workers' attitudes.[6] Since critical theory in particular can be fruitfully employed in the context of work and subjects,[7] in this article we draw on critical theorists, especially Erich Fromm, and argue that the discourses around a fundamental transformation of the world of work are becoming increasingly detached from the actual lived reality of work. Moreover, both the dystopias and the nebulous or unrealised utopias are creating a social climate that fuels regression: that is, a reversal of the progress towards individual emancipation, existential security and self-realisation. This regression is being driven by two mechanisms that involve subjects ceding their autonomy to an external authority in exchange for relief from the feelings of powerlessness engendered by the world of work. The first is a turn towards *open* authority (a reversion to paternalistic entrepreneurship), the second a turn towards *anonymous* authority (a 'solutionist' faith in technology's ability to solve every problem). In doing so, we follow up on debates that discuss critical theory's investigations of authoritarianism beyond the original context in which they arose.[8]

digitale Treppe: Wie die Digitalisierung unsere Arbeit verändert und wie wir damit umgehen. (Frankfurt: Bund, 2016). Daniel A. Skog, Henrik Wimelius and Johan Sandberg, "Digital Disruption." *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, vol. 60, no. 5 (2018): 431–437.

5 Charles Grantham, *Future of Work: The Promise of the New Digital Work Society*. (New York: McGraw-Hill., 2000). Constanze Kurz and Frank Rieger, *Arbeitsfrei: eine Entdeckungsreise zu den Maschinen, die uns ersetzen*. 2nd ed. (Munich: Riemann, 2013). Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*. (New York: Crown Books, 2017). Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. (New York: Putnam, 1996).

6 Sabine Pfeiffer, "Industrie 4.0 in the Making – Discourse Patterns and the Rise of Digital Despotism." In Kendra Briken, Shiona Chillas, Martin Krzywdzinski and Abigail Marks (eds.) *The New Digital Workplace: How Technologies Revolutionise Work*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 21–41.

7 Bradley King, "Putting Critical Theory to Work: Labor, Subjectivity and the Debts of the Frankfurt School." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 36, no. 6 (2010): 869–89.

8 James Aho, "Revisiting Authoritarianism." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2020): 329–41. David N. Smith, "Solidarity in Question: Critical Theory, Labor, and Anti-Semitism." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 5 (2009): 601–27. Mark P. Worrell, "Es Kommt Die

The article begins by outlining a meta-perspective on discourses of digitalisation and work (section 2). We then consider the resentment and risk of regression that result from these discourses. Our analysis is informed by social and critical theory, especially the ideas of Erich Fromm (section 3). Finally, we describe a project that serves as a small-scale model for a possible future approach, and situate it within a conceptual framework. For all these aspects, we use thoughts and concepts from Erich Fromm as a guidance.[9]

2. Discourses of work and digitalisation – and the realities on the shop floor

The transformation of (paid) work is being accelerated by various factors, including greater demand for technical innovation, more diversification and 'singularisation' of customer needs,[10] shorter product life cycles, intensified competition and the marketisation of intra-organisational relationships. A key part has been played in recent years by digitalisation, which (or at least so it is often claimed) is fundamentally changing work and leading to a polarisation: on the one hand, certain jobs and even entire professions are in danger of being replaced;[11] on the other, people working in the creative industries are set to be liberated from physical drudgery and stifling constraints by participatory,

Nacht: Paul Massing, the Frankfurt School, and the Question of Labor Authoritarianism during World War II." *Critical Sociology,* vol. 35, no. 5 (2009): 629–35.

9 This doesn't mean that we provide an overview about all the concepts and thoughts within the impressive oeuvre from Erich Fromm. Instead of that, we use them in order to get a deeper understanding of the discourses of digitalization, their risks and potential solutions.

10 Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2020).

11 Carl B. Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization?" https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf (2013). Katharina Dengler and Britta Matthes, „Folgen der Digitalisierung für die Arbeitswelt: Substituierbarkeitspotenziale von Berufen in Deutschland." https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/146097 (2015). For a critique see Sabine Pfeiffer and Anne Suphan, „Der AV-Index: Lebendiges Arbeitsvermögen und Erfahrung als Ressourcen auf dem Weg zu Industrie 4.0." https://www.sabine-pfeiffer.de/files/downloads/2015-Pfeiffer-Suphan-final.pdf (2015).

project-based models[12] that promise autonomy and freedom. With Erich Fromm, the discourse concerning 'New Work' could be considered as popular as it is promising, since it addresses the human striving for transcendence through active activity. With Fromm one might say that through creativity, man creates life and realizes himself in it – Fromm uses the metaphor from processes of giving birth with full intention.[13] The promises of 'New Work' are referring to a release of creative activities from the yoke of physical difficulties as well as - partially - from that of wage labor. The latter is achieved by deliberately presenting the 'new' forms of activity as relaxed and embedded in shirt-sleeved corporate cultures. The focus is not on strictly monitored efforts, but on creative flow. At the same time, the employee side takes a conspicuously relaxed (not to say naïve) approach to questions of pay and compensation: The focus is not on the highest possible paycheck, but - once again - on creative flow. In other words, the use value of work becomes more important, the exchange value less important. Gainful employment is thus - in Fromm's words - removed to a certain extent from the mode of having and takes place increasingly in the mode of being.[14] Thus, it becomes more and more important to feel something like a flow within the work process; employment takes on an experiential character, so to speak.[15] Digitalization should - in short - lead to the realization of self-transcendence in the mode of being for the (few) people and employees from a kind of creative class, the valleys of lamentation of (physical) effort as well as interest politics is remaining behind - as far as the theory goes.

However, these analyses and the policies based on them are rooted in a naive techno-centrism that conflates technical possibility with social reality. Techno-centrism can also be deployed more knowingly and strategically, for instance to strengthen the hand of employers in disputes over

12 On the concept of 'New Work', see Frithjof Bergmann, *New Work, New Culture*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2019).

13 Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1942), 35.

14 Erich Fromm *To have or to Be?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

15 Erich Fromm, *To Have Or to Be?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 76.

pay. Dystopias about the loss of jobs and entire professions have proved highly effective as a way to discipline wage-dependent workers.[16] Prior to the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns, there was practically full employment in German-speaking countries, yet wage growth remained modest, and the public discourse focused not on how full employment and demographic change put workers in a stronger position, but instead on how lucky 'tomorrow's unemployed' were to still have jobs. Among other things, this discourse has allowed employers to get away with pay rises that do not even come close to making up for years of real-term pay cuts, without this provoking a massive outcry.

The ideological character of the 'digitalisation will cause job losses' discourse is further evident in the industries and professions it is claimed will be replaced. The focus is mainly on the skilled trades, as well as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in industries such as manufacturing and logistics. The discourse in its current form thus dovetails neatly with the trend of workers in manual and caring professions being valued less than knowledge workers[17] and with policies designed to increase the numbers of university graduates despite the proven success of the dual vocational training model.[18]

If we turn our attention away from the discourse, which clearly serves certain interests and ideologies better than others, and instead look at the actual situation in workplaces, we will find little evidence of a widespread replacement of human labour. At present, human workers remain central to capitalist value creation, and not just in the 'creative industries'. In many cases, the processes of change described above are attributable not to more academically qualified workers, but rather to a willingness

16 Philipp Staab and Florian Butollo, „Sündenbock Roboter: Hype und Hysterie um die Digitalisierung von Arbeit." *Le monde diplomatique,* vol. 02/20 (2020): 3.

17 David Goodhart, *Head Hand Heart: The Struggle for Dignity and Status in the 21st Century*. (London: Allen Lane, 2020).

18 Something Julian Nida-Rümelin critically describes as a 'mania for academisation' [*Akademisierungswahn*], which has negative consequences for all workers. *Der Akademisierungswahn: Zur Krise beruflicher und akademischer Bildung*. (Hamburg: Edition Körber, 2014).

to engage in lifelong learning.[19] But even if we do accept that creative occupations will be less affected by digitalisation than ones involving routine tasks,[20] things are not entirely rosy in the 'creative industries' either, where jobs are often poorly paid and insecure. Demands such as autonomy, creativity and project-based collaboration are increasingly understood not as arguments for paying workers more, but as special perks that justify paying them less. Moreover, and unsurprisingly, autonomy, creativity and so on always come with caveats.[21] Rather than being ends in themselves, they are closely tied to company goals and limited by available resources. Employees are forced to alternate between different logics of autonomy (e.g. individual, project/team-based or departmental) with conflicting demands. Values such as creativity are often respected only in principle, not in practice. In Fromm's words, the mode of having strikes back with full force: The well-sounding promises in the sense of transcendence and discourse of being are put aside; what remains is the insight that the imperatives of capital utilization are still the only valid ones.[22]

To put it pointedly, we might say that so-called 'high potentials' get stuck in poorly paid jobs on fixed-term contracts, waiting for the day when they will finally be freed from stifling constraints and conflicting demands so that they can unlock their full potential; while many others feel devalued and afraid for their jobs despite a state of almost full employment.

19 Gerhard Bosch, „Weiterbildung 4.0 – Wie kann sie eigentlich finanziert werden?" *WSI-Mitteilungen,* vol. 70, no. 2 (2017): 158–160.

20 Frey and Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization?" Dengler and Matthes, „Folgen der Digitalisierung für die Arbeitswelt: Substituierbarkeitspotenziale von Berufen in Deutschland."

21 Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voss, „Fremdorganisierte Selbstorganisation: Eine soziologische Diskussion aktueller Managementkonzepte." *Zeitschrift für Personalforschung,* vol. 11, no. 1 (1997): 30–53. Frank Kleemann, „Subjektivierung von Arbeit: Eine Reflexion zum Stand des Diskurses." *Arbeits- und industriesoziologische Studien,* vol. 5, no. 2 (2012): 6–20.

22 Fromm, *To Have Or to Be?*

3. The future of work: resentment and regression?

Discussions on current social practices[23] and technologies are not new in critical theory,[24] but especially the debates on work and digital change raised the question to what extent the ideas of critical theory can also be used in this context. Precisely because it is a matter of arguing beyond the technocratic understanding of digital transformation.[25] At the same time, these discussions do not lack the terminology that can be related to critical theory. Having said that, digitalisation is associated with a promise of 'freedom' from certain things. That includes hope for the kind of freedom described by Erich Fromm: that is to say, a hope that digitalisation and the new models of work associated with it will reduce drudgery and constraints, and so allow people to unlock their productive, creative potential and realise their individual selves.[26] However, as we saw in the previous section, the discourse around digitalisation has impacted negatively on workers' interests, even though the predicted digital transformation has so far barely materialised on the shop floor.[27] The negative effects of digitalisation are given far more prominence in the discourse than the positive ones, such as the prospect of a 'brave new

23 Craig Browne, "Social Practices and the Constitution of Knowledge: Critical Social Theory as a Philosophy of Praxis." *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2020): 37-156.

24 Gerard Delanty and Neal Harris, "Critical Theory and the Question of Technology: The Frankfurt School Revisited." *Thesis Eleven,* vol. 166, no. 1 (2021): 88-108. Andrew Feenberg, "Critical Theory of Technology and STS." *Thesis Eleven,* vol. 138, no. 1 (2017): 3–12. Paula Garcia Cherep and Adriana Gonzalo, "Towards a New Interpretation of Horkheimer´s Stance towards Science and Technology in the Context of his Critique to Positivism." *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory,* vol. 6, no. 1 (2022): 177–205. Steve Garlick, "Complexity, Masculinity, and Critical Theory: Revisiting Marcuse on Technology, Eros, and Nature." *Critical Sociology,* vol. 39, no. 2 (2011): 223–38.

25 Feenberg, "Critical Theory of Technology and STS," 3–12.

26 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*.

27 See for instance Maren Evers, Martin Krzywdzinski and Sabine Pfeiffer on the 'wearables' phenomenon. "Wearable Computing im Betrieb gestalten: Rolle und Perspektiven der Lösungsentwickler im Prozess der Arbeitsgestaltung." *Arbeit,* vol. 28, no. 1 (2019): 3–27.

world of work'[28] in which (some) people, freed from drudgery, are able to give free rein to their creativity. This divergence between potential and actual social development has been the subject of numerous studies in the critical theory tradition. In this section, we will apply some ideas from that tradition to the discourse around digitalisation, with a particular focus on the work of Erich Fromm (who was deeply concerned with curtailments of freedom).

It is undeniable that technical progress can free workers from constraints and (physical) drudgery, and give them back more of their time; that is not merely a hope, but a potential inherent in technology. However, as described above, in reality this potential does not generally translate into greater freedom for workers; it does not strengthen their negotiating power, give them more leisure time or allow them to realise their individual selves. In our view, 'digitalisation' presents a one-sided notion of freedom that, in line with Fromm's theory[29], fuels regressive tendencies. As he and other critical theorists argue, this regression is evident in a social climate characterised by romanticisation of an imaginary past, and by resentment or naked hostility towards social change and the groups deemed responsible for it. One reason for this is that the one-sided freedom under capitalism causes a fundamental 'deformation of human reason'.[30] In conditions of reification, technology's potential is not directed towards the integrated social whole that underpins reason and rationality, or to the attainment of mastery over nature, self-preservation and freedom (especially freedom from the constant struggle for survival), but is instead transformed into a destructive power that gives rise to violence and precarious forms of life and work.[31] Applied to the present context, this means that digitalisation is used to replace human

28 Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

29 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*.

30 Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 61.

31 Alex Demirović, „Vernunft und Emanzipation." In Uwe H. Bittlingmayer, Alex Demirović and Tatjana Freytag (eds.) *Handbuch Kritische Theorie*. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019): 187–209. Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*.

labour, rather than to support and optimise it; yet those who are soon to be replaced remain essentially reliant on this labour and must attempt to generate demand with ever more outlandish forms of creativity.

These tendencies are due to the Janus-headed concept of freedom that, to paraphrase Fromm[32], promises to set people free, yet offers no viable route by which that can be achieved. This is a freedom *from* something, not a freedom *to* something, and it drives subjects to seek ways of escaping situations in which they feel powerless. Fromm linked this freedom to capitalist modernity, which liberated people from the (immediate) constraints of nature, only to impose social constraints on them instead. Freed from thraldom to nature (by means, such as digital technology, that allow the limits of space and time to be transcended), yet offered no prospect of freedom, subjects come to feel powerless and disconnected; where once it was nature by which they felt overpowered, now it is the demands of society. Fromm believed this would cause them to reject the hopes and ideas of the Enlightenment,[33] combined with a seemingly inescapable realism that disparages any alternative as naive. Under digital capitalism, this realism takes the form of 'solutionism': a new 'polity' that redefines social problems as technological ones.[34] Technology is posited not just as part of the solution but as the only alternative; human problems can be solved simply by acquiring the necessary knowledge.[35] Instead of considering different options and weighing up different interests, everything is reduced to questions of knowledge. Social discourses are 'epistemised'[36] and socioeconomic problems reduced to ones of technical feasibility. Fromm describes how social dynamics increase our knowledge and mastery over nature, of which digitalisation can be seen as another expression, yet people nonetheless feel uneasy, powerless,

32 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*.

33 Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1949).

34 Oliver Nachtwey and Timo Seidl, "The Solutionist Ethic and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism." https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/322882436.pdf (2020): 11.

35 Alexander Bogner, *Die Epistemisierung des Politischen: Wie die Macht des Wissens die Demokratie gefährdet*. (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2021).

36 Bogner, *Die Epistemisierung des Politischen*.

devoid of purpose; one is reminded here of the feeling of redundancy that can be prompted by the looming threat of technology taking away people's jobs.

If we accept a 'relativistic' position that treats quantitative knowledge of the world as the sole source of reason and relegates value judgements and ethical norms to the domain of 'taste or arbitrary preference', the result will be that 'irrational value systems' in which 'the demands of the State, the enthusiasm for magic qualities of powerful leaders, powerful machines, and material success become the sources for […] norms and value judgments'.[37] Fromm and other critical theorists argue that although we possess new and better technology, we have also become ensnared in this technology, so that rather than being a means to an end it has become the true end of rational action, and people and their relationships its means.[38] 'Man', writes Fromm, is thus made 'a servant to the very machine he built'.[39] This 'social pathology of reason […] requires people to concentrate their capacity for reason on the ego-centric calculation of economic utility'.[40]

For our present purposes, which are far more modest in scope, what this means is that the lived reality of work will corroborate this impression of a one-sided freedom. Many people still work on the shop floor, but increasingly they are poorly paid, have precarious contracts and working relationships, are monitored by digital technology and bureaucratic systems, and are deformed by performance targets into precarised, entrepreneurial selves.[41] The loss of 'old certainties', as fragile as they

37 Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 5.

38 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*. Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory'. In Max Horkheimer (ed.), *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. (New York: Continuum, 1982): 188–243. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

39 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 96.

40 Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*, 62.

41 Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß, *Arbeitskraftunternehmer: Erwerbsorientierungen in entgrenzten Arbeitsformen*. (Frankfurt and New York: Edition Sigma, 2003). Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject.* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015).

sometimes were, has not been balanced out by an equally good alternative. Instead, workers are often forced, within a framework of 'heteronomous autonomy',[42] to take responsibility for processes without being given the necessary resources. This creates conflicting demands, which have contributed to rising levels of stress.[43] Capital's transformation problem is shifted into the workers themselves, who often want to work creatively and autonomously, but find their 'creativity' limited to predefined, closely monitored tracks and their 'autonomy' to minutely documented management of scarce resources, all governed by seemingly objective and alternative-less performance indicators that drive the internal marketisation of companies. Günther is critical of this kind of 'autonomy':

> The empowerment of the individual to become the subject of their actions can only ever be a self-empowerment. Only if the subject can freely choose themselves as an autonomous subject, can they become an autonomous subject. […] A merely assigned, imposed or even compelled autonomy tips over into its opposite; it would be mere heteronomy […]. Someone who lives in a state of poverty and need, who is socially marginalised, lacks recognition, is psychologically deprived, who has no or only limited access to their society's cultural resources, will experience the demand for more autonomy as a kind of heteronomy.[44]

The greater autonomy that digitalisation has supposedly given people in their work is thus experienced as something imposed from without, before which they are powerless. Consequently,

42 Stephanie Stadelbacher and Fritz Böhle, „Selbstorganisation als sozialer Mechanismus der reflexivmodernen Herstellung sozialer Ordnung? Zur gesellschaftlichen Verortung von Selbstorganisation und ihre theoretisch-konzeptuelle Bestimmung." In Fritz Böhle and Werner Schneider (eds.) *Subjekt – Handeln – Institution: Vergesellschaftung und Subjekt in der Reflexiven Moderne.* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2016): 318–348.

43 Manfred Moldaschl and G. Günter Voß, *Subjektivierung von Arbeit.* (Munich: Rainer Hampp, 2003). Jeanette Moosbrugger, *Subjektivierung von Arbeit: Freiwillige Selbstausbeutung*. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008).

44 Klaus Günther, „Zwischen Ermächtigung und Disziplinierung. Verantwortung im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus." In Axel Honneth (ed.) *Befreiung aus der Mündigkeit: Paradoxien des gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus.* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002): 121.

> the idea of the dignity and power of man, which gave man the strength and courage for the tremendous accomplishments of the last few centuries, is challenged by the suggestion that we have to revert to the acceptance of man's ultimate powerlessness and insignificance. This idea threatens to destroy the very roots from which our culture grew.[45]

If Fromm is correct in his diagnosis, then regressive attitudes will thrive in this context; Günther posits that 'subjective escapes from this mesh [of imposed responsibility] are possible only where there is no longer any responsibility'.[46] This desire for escape is expressed in a yearning for the (seeming) certainties of the past, including the sometimes controversial figures who embody those certainties; in a yearning for a 'pater familias' at the head of the company; in a wholesale rejection of technology and project-based, agile and participatory management methods. All these examples share a common structure: (seeming) certainties, rigid structures and the people who embody them are preferred to uncertainties and freedoms, and the dark side to these regressive fantasies are ignored: the 'pater familias' can also represent sexism, despotism, hostility to technology, a regression to immaturity and helplessness, hierarchies, rigidity and hubris.

But this is not the only form regression can take. The promise of salvation associated with digitalisation can be understood as equally regressive. It represents an escape into solutionism, an unconditional faith in technology, in which subjects who feel they lack any control or influence appeal to a power outside themselves. Latching on to the utopian promises of digitalisation, they subordinate themselves to an 'anonymous authority'[47] that presents itself as the only alternative. They may also look for individuals who embody this 'solutionist ethic'[48] and serve as guarantors for technology's power to solve any problem, such as Elon Musk,

45 Fromm, *Man for Himself,* 5.

46 Günther, "Zwischen Ermächtigung und Disziplinierung," 136.

47 Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society.* (New York: Rinehart, 1955): 152ff. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 144.

48 Nachtwey and Seidl, "The Solutionist Ethic and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism."

Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs. This appeal to technology and its problem-solving potential, and the cult around these solutionist authorities, help compensate for subjects' loss of certainty and make their weakness and isolation easier to bear. Such a subject 'admires authority and tends to submit to it, but at the same time he wants to be an authority himself and have others submit to him'.[49]

We can thus identify in the discourse two main mechanisms by which subjects escape from (discursively constructed or actually experienced) powerlessness and isolation. Firstly, an unconditional faith in technology, to compensate for their own lack of control and influence; secondly, a regression to the past and an idealisation of paternalistic, 'command-and-control' attitudes. In both cases, subjects give up their own autonomy in order to quell their feelings of powerlessness. They turn either towards open authority (back to paternalistic entrepreneurship) or anonymous authority (a technology that offers solutions to every problem). The chief problem with these approaches is that they respond to one-sided technicist discourses not with concrete actions and (political) countermeasures, such as reconceiving digitalisation in terms of supporting rather than replacing human labour, but instead with solutionist and/or authoritarian ideals.

4. Shaping the future of work

Faced with the risk of regression, it is not enough merely to offer a theoretical interpretation. Nor can we simply catalogue observable facts and expect this will do anything to combat the regressive tendencies. Rather, we should take our cue from Horkheimer, who described the task of 'true' researchers as being

> to pursue their larger philosophical questions on the basis of the most precise scientific methods, to revise and refine their questions in the course of their substantive work, and to develop new methods without losing sight of the larger context.[50]

49 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 141.

50 Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an

Following this approach, we seek to formulate realistic scenarios for the future world of work that are based on actual shop-floor reality. What these scenarios lack in utopian or dystopian creativity they make up for with their sober realism, their grounding in experience and their analysis informed by critical theory. Central to this is the fact that the current experience is primarily one of alienation, which fosters regression. Fromm describes this as a subjective phenomenon in which the individual feels alienated.[51] One no longer experiences oneself as the center of the world and master of one's own activity, but as being in dependence. According to Fromm, he faces himself and others as an object – similar to what Fromm describes for the marketing character.[52]

Thereby potentials and possibilities are inherent in the subjects.[53] However, one lives under social conditions that obstruct this potential - also with regard to digital work. Thus, what was originally a satisfying and enjoyable activity becomes a duty and a compulsion. in Fromm's estimation, the possibility of productive activity degenerates into an isolated partial function. It has degenerated into a mere activity, the result of which is often lost in a product that the worker himself can no longer understand and with which he no longer has any connection.

Since the basic structures have not changed so far, this can also be assumed for work in the context of digital transformation. This means that even if a relief in physical work takes place, conditions of alienation remain. Thus, processes such as digitalisation are never merely technically induced, but also economically driven and socially negotiated. When new technical and organisational solutions emerge, they are always bound by context. They must integrate with, and be negotiated within, existing processes, structures and institutions, from company cultures to systems of education and qualification.

Institute for Social Research." In Max Horkheimer (ed.), *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993): 9–10.

51 Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

52 Fromm, *Man for Himself.*

53 Fromm, *To Have Or to Be?*

In overcoming alienated conditions, however, Fromm is by no means thinking of changing the technical side of labor, especially its division.[54] What would have to be redesigned is the social side. Thus, for Fromm, it is primarily a matter of the labor situation having to be concretized again. In this context, the possibility of reflection on, information about, as well as the influence and involvement of the employees in the decision of the work is of paramount importance.[55] We can therefore attempt to restore workers' (discursive) agency, and to curb the reductive, technicist fantasies of omnipotence driven by the interests of certain groups and the regressive tendencies driven by feelings of powerlessness. That is to say, we can take practical action, make practical interventions. And in this context, theory can also be understood as having practical relevance, not least because pure praxis without theory will, according to Adorno, be confined to merely instrumental reason.[56] Adorno also stresses the importance of a grounding in experience:

> What since then has been called the problem of praxis and today culminates in the question of the relation between theory and praxis coincides with the loss of experience caused by the rationality of the eternally same. Where experience is blocked or altogether absent, praxis is damaged and therefore longed for, distorted, and desperately overvalued. Thus what is called the problem of praxis is interwoven with the problem of knowledge.[57]

According to Adorno, praxis without theory will necessarily go awry. But while Adorno believed no mediation between theory and praxis was possible in the present circumstances, Fromm was hopeful that this could be achieved, and advocated exploring potential spaces of transformation. As Bierhoff puts it, Fromm was a 'socially involved thinker' who sought 'to contribute to changing the existing order of things through

54 Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

55 Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

56 Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

57 Adorno, *Critical Models*, 260

illusion-dispelling critique and practical-political and therapeutic intervention'.[58]

Fromm sees the abolition of the separation of theoretical and practical knowledge as a fundamental component for overcoming alienation. This can happen through a reorganization of educational processes or through individual interventions. The basic idea here is that theoretical instruction and practical work are combined in order to obtain as holistic an overview as possible of activities and the processes involved.[59] Applying these ideas to the present topic, we can identify three main steps that can be taken to help shape the future of work and digitalisation. Firstly, digitalisation should be conceived in terms of support and augmentation rather than replacement.[60] The guiding question would then no longer be where and to what extent human labour will or can be made redundant by digital solutions, but how those solutions can free human workers from impediments such as conflicting demands and physically taxing or productivity-sapping tasks. A second step is to highlight that digital solutions are still products of human labour. Digital solutions must be developed, produced, marketed and sold, their individual components must be purchased and the people entrusted with all these tasks must be recruited and trained We can thus oppose a one-sided techno-centrism simply by pointing out that digital solutions are human solutions. Thirdly, we must show that workers' experience and knowledge cannot be replaced by technology, but will remain the 'form-giving fire' of labour and value creation.[61] This applies both to work *on* digital tools (their development, production, etc.) and work *with* digital tools.

This should serve man in becoming aware of his essential needs and their previous obstacles to satisfaction in the social structure. This creates

58 Burkhard Bierhoff, „Vom Gesellschaftscharakter zur humanistischen Kritik der Erziehung." In Michael Kessler and Rainer Funk (eds.) *Erich Fromm und die Frankfurter Schule*. (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1992): 20.

59 Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

60 Pfeiffer & Suphan *Arbeitsvermögens-Index*. Online

61 Wieland Jäger and Sabine Pfeiffer, „'Die Arbeit ist das lebendige, gestaltende Feuer …' Der Marxsche Arbeitsbegriff und Lars Clausens Entwurf einer modernen Arbeitssoziologie." *Arbeit*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1996): 223–247.

the prerequisite for the productive activity of man in his work. Under these conditions, a non-alienated activity can be realized and the possible productive character can unfold. For non-alienated activity is productive activity, in which the relationship to the product is maintained, which can also be interpreted as character orientation, to which, thanks to reason, every human being is in principle capable.[62] Productivity means to use the powers that lie in man and to realize the possibilities. For this he must be basically free and not be in dependence. Marcuse argues in a similar direction when he speaks of a mature culture providing material and intellectual wealth to guarantee painless satisfaction of needs. The drive energy is then no longer expended on laborious work, so that a wide area of repressive constraints, modifications, and alienation need no longer be maintained, and the organization of human existence as an instrument of labor is suspended.[63] To provide this basic condition, the digital transformation can also contribute to a certain extent. However, we live under domination that systematically hinders this satisfaction via additional repression. The driving repression is then no longer the result of a necessity of work performance but of the specific organization of work.[64]

However, he can only use these forces if he knows what they are, how he uses them and what he can use them for. Thus, man experiences himself as an agent. In contrast to the regressive tendency, this means that the activity is not the command of an authority in form as well as in content.[65] As explained, however, the drive to act currently emanates from authorities, which Fromm calls 'automaton activity.' The source of the activity is thus not one's own experience (which, however, would be a condition for non-alienated activity), but an external drive.[66]

62 Fromm, *To Have Or to Be?*

63 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. (Boston: Beacon, 1955).

64 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization.*

65 Fromm, *Man for Himself.*

66 Fromm, *Man for Himself.*

The 'Labouratory Days' at the Nuremberg Campus of Technology (NCT) are an exemplary attempt to do all above mentioned three steps on a modest scale.[67] The approach can be interpreted in line with Oskar Negt's notion of 'exemplary learning'.[68] In this the interrelation of the general and the specific plays a crucial role. According to this Negt emphasizes:

> I believe that incorporating people's own interests and associations into the educational process is very useful for learning and education to be successful. Because otherwise their issues are ignored. This is my basic thesis about exemplary learning: no education can avoid involving people's own interests in its learning process. Working through their contradictions, prejudices, and confusions must be in the foreground. In the present social situation, and this will grow stronger, education has to produce a general or universal consciousness. Education cannot be reduced to something special or particular. We have to develop something universal from the particular.[69]

During the workshops of the 'Labouratory Days', we work with participants to identify their current views on digitalisation. We then demonstrate how labour-intensive digital technology is, by having them conduct an experiment where they attempt to program robots. The participants then discuss what areas of their specific work could benefit from support from digital tools, what form these tools could take and who at their company would need to be persuaded of their benefits. This format is intended to familiarise participants with the three points set out above and encourage them to think of specific ways that digital technology could be used to help them in their work – thus applying a Horkheimerian approach to the topic of digitalisation. Our approach should help, as demanded by Fromm, to abolish the boundary of theoretical and practical

67 Stefan Sauer, Marco Blank and Sabine Pfeiffer, "Labouratory: Making Work and Digitalization Participatory – Instead of Discursively Playing Them Off against One Other." *Journal of International Management Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2021): 33–41.

68 Oskar Negt, *Soziologische Phantasie und exemplarisches Lernen: zur Theorie d. Arbeiterbildung.* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1987).

69 Kerstin Pohl and Klaus-Peter Hufer, "An Interview with Oskar Negt (2004)." *International Labor and Working-Class History,* vol. 90 (2016): 206.

knowledge and to enable a critical reconsideration of one's own situation. Of course, this does not abolish the states of alienation themselves, but it helps under certain circumstances to cross a threshold of reflection and thus not to fall prey to authoritarian orientation. From Fromm's point of view, this is especially significant because it is not sufficient to change socio-economic conditions. Also, the other way round one will not dissolve the alienation - but it can perhaps be understood as a beginning.

5. Conclusion

The approach to work and the digitalisation of work set out here certainly has its limits. For instance, it is questionable whether it can overcome the tendencies towards irrationality and regression that exist today. However, we hope the article may contribute to 'labor as a fundamental problem in critical sociology'[70] and has at least succeeded in showing how social and critical theory can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digitalisation and the effects of the discourse that surrounds it. A crucial point is 'that subjects can still experience the deformation of their reason in a specific way',[71] albeit in our case only to a modest degree. In the unease about the supposedly rational progress of digitalisation, and the defensive reactions it prompts, we can witness a diminution of rationality and its potential. In short, it can be empirically observed that the discourses of digitalisation have little connection to the reality of digitalisation on the shop floor, and consequently result in a 'massive feeling of individual powerlessness'.[72] Reductive technicism – a 'symptom of a deformed reason'[73] – and its emphasis on the irrefutability and revolutionary character of digital disruption motivates attempts to escape: into technical solutionism, authoritarianism or, as a combination of both, a solutionist authoritarianism presided over by cult figures of

70 Bradley King, "Putting Critical Theory to Work: Labor, Subjectivity and the Debts of the Frankfurt School." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 36, no. 6 (2010): 869.

71 Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason,* 68.

72 Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*, 66.

73 Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*, 65.

technological change.

Notwithstanding, it is in no way intended at this point to take a position hostile to technology in this paper. Rather, we follow Delanty and Harris, who emphasize, with regard to critical theory, that its representatives 'were primarily critical of the association of technological advancement with progress and, unlike the conservative critique of technology, they saw a close connection between technology and capitalism. Moreover, there is no indication of nostalgia for a pre-technological past in the Frankfurt School texts.'[74] Thus, we can oppose these tendencies by correcting the distorted pictures that techno-centrism paints of shop-floor realities, and working to unlock the potential of rationality and, moreover, contribute to the discussion on 'revisiting authoritarianism'[75] in this context. 'Digitalisation' is not a given reality; rather, it is a product of concrete social processes of labour and value creation, which determine how and, in whose interests, digital technology will be used – whether to replace human labour or to augment and support it. Also, if the digital transformation offers a relief in physical work – which, with Marcuse, offers in principle a way out of an alienated situation[76] –, conditions of alienation remain. Following Fromm's thinking we want to concretise the labor situation to overcoming the alienated conditions. We are aware that our approach does not fully abolish the states of alienation themselves, but we hope that it helps under certain circumstances to cross a threshold of reflection and thus not to fall prey to authoritarian orientation.

74 Delanty and Harris, "Critical Theory and the Question of Technology," 90.

75 Aho, "Revisiting Authoritarianism," 329–41.

76 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization.*

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The Deleuze-Adorno encounter: on the critique of dialectics, the defense of negative dialectics and the negativity in Adorno's thought

Nektarios Kastrinakis[1]

Abstract: One of the most influential and enduring elements of the impact that Deleuze's work had, and still has, is its critique of dialectics. This is documented in Alberto Bonnet's acute observation that today the problem with "anti-capitalist political practices" is "that they are conceived in terms of a philosophy which is quintessentially alien or even opposed, to any dialectics, in particular post-structuralist philosophy". As far as we know, there has never been an attempt to challenge Deleuze's critique of dialectics, and this is the gap the present article attempts to fill. It argues that Adorno's negative dialectics provides the resources for a comprehensive challenge to Deleuze's Nietzsche-inspired critique of dialectics. To do so, however, an inconsistency in its perspective regarding the affirmation and negation of life must and can be rectified without leaving the ground of the nonidentity thesis. As a consequence of such modification, effected under the weight of Deleuze's Nietzschean critique, the charge against the extreme and politically baren negativity of Adorno's thought can also be addressed.

Introduction

One of the most enduring elements of Deleuze's work is its critique of dialectics. For Alberto Bonnet, lack of dialectics is also one of the most significant obstacles for the project of emancipation in the contemporary historicopolitical conjunction: "The problem today does not lie so much in the fact that anti-capitalist political practices are conceived in terms of a reactionary positive dialectics … but in that they are conceived

1 Dr. Nektarios Kastrinakis received his PhD from the Department of Politics of the University of York, UK in 2023 under the supervision of Professor Werner Bonefeld and Dr. James Clarke. His doctoral thesis has the title *Deleuze's and Adorno's Nietzsche: Nietzsche as the philosopher of the unconscious and as inconsistent nonidentity, dialectical thinker*. He has presented papers in several conferences, including 10th International Deleuze Studies Conference in Toronto 2017, the 15th Annual Historical Materialism Conference in London 2018 (where he presented the main argument of this article), and the Annual Friedrich Nietzsche Society Conference in Tilburg, The Netherlands 2019. The article is part and contains further elaborations of his doctoral thesis.

in terms of a philosophy which is quintessentially alien or even opposed, to any dialectics, in particular poststructuralist philosophy."[2] So far, we have not encountered any effort to challenge this anti-dialectical attitude by calling into question Deleuze's critique of dialectics. We think that Adorno's negative dialectics provides the resources for a comprehensive challenge of Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics, which, however, does not leave negative dialectics unscathed: the encounter between the two yields an important modification of Adorno's nonidentity thesis, in relation to the affirmation and negation of the value of life, which is necessary for challenging the critique of dialectics effectively *and for negative dialectics' own consistency*.

In addition, this same modification addresses some important critiques, leveled from different quarters, against Adorno's extreme negativity, which supposedly leads Critical Theory into a dead-end, as the Marxists of the New Left of the 1960's charged.[3] Adorno's negativity supposedly does not leave "room within a materialist perspective for *some* redeemable notion of positive knowledge"[4] and does not overcome the relativism that it professes to be conceived against because it provides no positive standard of judgment of conflicting ideas, for instance between different ideas regarding freedom or equality.[5] Very recently, a similar argument was put forward by Michael J. Thompson, who argued that Adorno's extreme negativity fails to provide "critical philosophy" with "a framework for praxis," a framework for "praxis-oriented social critique," ending up in "practical inertia and ethical solipsism".[6] We will

2 Alberto R. Bonnet, "Antagonism and Difference: Negative Dialectics and Poststructuralism in view of the Critique of Modern Capitalism", in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, ed. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros and Sergio Tischler, (Pluto Press, 2009), 42.

3 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 190.

4 Peter Osborne, A Marxism for the postmodern? Jameson's Adorno. *New German Critique*, 56, (1992): 190.

5 David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*. (Polity Press, 2004), 383.

6 Michael J. Thompson, "From *Negative Dialectics* to Critical Metaphysics: Adorno, He-

indicate in this essay that Adorno's extreme negativism can be rectified without discarding negative dialectics altogether and without the need to resort back to a kind of Hegelian Marxism. We just need to acknowledge the affirmative moment inscribed at the heart of the nonidentity thesis, disregarded by Adorno himself, i.e., by consistently following the nonidentity insight.

Therefore, the case that the present article ventures to make is twofold: primarily, it will show that a modified negative dialectics which acknowledges the affirmative moment that lies at its heart can effectively challenge Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics. Incidentally, in the course of the development of this argument, it will also be indicated a way to address negative dialectics' extreme negativity by way of this same modification comprising essentially in *following consistently* the nonidentity insight.

We will begin by presenting Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics from the pages of his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. We will then briefly present Adorno's negative dialectics. Next, we will develop the dialogue between the two philosophers around the issue of the critique and the defense of dialectics, giving our findings at the conclusion of the essay.

Deleuze's critique of dialectics in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*

Deleuze's book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is famous not only for the novel interpretation of Nietzsche's thought it advances but also for the critique of Hegel and of Hegelian dialectics that goes along with it. Deleuze's critique of dialectics predated his study of Nietzsche and had already been attempted in his early studies on Bergson, as we learn from Hardt.[7] Regarding *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, what is most striking

gel and Marx on the Structure of Critical Reason", *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory*, 7, no 1 (2023): 6.

7 Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: an Apprenticeship to Philosophy*, (University College London Press, 1993). Hardt argues that Deleuze's article *La Conception de la Différence chez Bergson* [1956] presents the only and "most powerful" direct confrontation with Hegel's dialectics in Deleuze's work (see Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze*, 9). He also argues that

in this book is that two out of its five chapters (Chapter 1 – The Tragic, and Chapter 5 – The Overman: against dialectics) and a considerable part of the conclusion are, in effect, developing arguments against Hegel and dialectics based on Nietzschean grounds. The driving force behind the development of Chapter 1 is, surprisingly, the effort to refute the "pretext" given by Nietzsche's notion of the tragic in viewing him as a dialectician.[8] This line of argument allows Deleuze to go through most of the themes that he is going to develop in more detail in the rest of the book: the theory of forces and of the will to power, ressentiment and bad conscience, affirmation of life, nihilism, eternal return, and the overman, are all treated in a preliminary way. In Chapter 5 of this book, it is argued that:

> Nietzsche's work is directed against dialectic for three reasons: [1] it [dialectics, NK] misinterprets sense because it does not know the nature of the forces which concretely appropriate phenomena; [2] it misinterprets essence because it does not know the real element from which forces, their qualities and their relations derive; [3] it misinterprets change and transformation because it is content to work with permutations of abstract and unreal terms.[9]

This is to say that it lacks a theory of forces, it lacks a theory of the will to power, and it jumps from subject to predicate and from predicate back

"many of Deleuze's claims for Nietzsche's attack on the dialectic remain obscure unless we read into them a Bergsonean critique of a negative ontological movement." (Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze*, xix). We think that both these claims are contestable in the sense that there is a direct confrontation with dialectics in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* which is stronger than the Bergson-inspired one. We think that what is clarified by reference to the latter, instead, are the weaknesses of Deleuze's critique of dialectics which, moreover, are passed on in *Difference and Repetition.* The force of the Nietzschean critique of dialectics is obscured rather than clarified if we bring in Bergson. Nevertheless, Hardt, but also Keith Ansell-Pearson (Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*, (London: Poutledge 1999): 82 & 85), provide an invaluable observation, namely that Deleuze rejects the existence of any structures of being constituted prior to difference, a move with reference to which his critique of dialectics on Bergsonean ground can only make sense. If, however, one contests and drops this presupposition, Deleuze's Bergsonean critique of dialectics collapses.

8 We say "surprisingly" because we think that Nietzsche gives plenty of other "pretexts" to be viewed as a dialectical thinker.

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London-New York: Continuum, 2005), 158.

to subject without ever determining what each of them is: "They remain as little determined at the end as they were at the beginning."[10] At the bottom, dialectics transforms "difference" into "opposition" and is the "natural ideology of *ressentiment* and bad conscience."[11]

Nihilism is the bottom line of Deleuze's, Nietzsche-inspired, critique of dialectics.[12] The problem with dialectics is that it uses as its starting point the negation of the "other" instead of the affirmation of its own difference. This makes it an essentially reactive mode of thinking where the initiative belongs to the external "other" against which dialectical thinking re-acts. In this respect, Deleuze quotes *Genealogy of Morals,* where Nietzsche writes: "While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself,' and this No is its creative deed."[13] And Deleuze adds: "This is why Nietzsche presents the dialectic as the speculation of the pleb, as the way of thinking of the slave: the abstract thought of contradiction then prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of aggression."[14] In a word, dialectics is condemned "as the ideology of *ressentiment*."[15] However, the problem with a mode of thinking under the sway of ressentiment, as we said, resides above all in its nihilistic consequences, i.e., to the fact that it brings along with it a "denying [of] life" and a "depreciation of existence."[16]

Another aspect of Deleuze's critique of dialectics is that dialectics is constantly posing a negation and then a negation of the negation to reach

10 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 157.

11 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 159.

12 Ressentiment, bad conscience, and the ascetic ideal are the three forms of nihilism in Nietzsche for Deleuze (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 87).

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. In *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo,* edited by Walter Kaufmann, 1-198. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 36; cited in Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 10.

14 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 10.

15 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 121.

16 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 34.

an affirmation or, as Schrift puts it, a unifying synthesis.[17] It seems that Deleuze has a particular understanding of dialectics which leads him to brand it as the "ideology of ressentiment" and socialism as its "final avatar… before the nihilistic conclusion."[18]

We think, contrary to Hardt, that all these elements are aiming directly at dialectics, have an independent standing as points of critique rooted on Nietzschean ground, and are much more challenging than those afforded by Bergsonean means.

It is useful to codify the main points of Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics: Dialectics [1] misinterprets sense, i.e., lacks a theory of forces; [2] misinterprets essence, i.e., lacks a theory of the will to power; [3] jumps from subject to predicate and from predicate back to subject without ever determining what each of them is: "They remain as little determined at the end as they were at the beginning"; [4] constantly poses a negation and then a negation of the negation or a synthesis; [5] starts from the negation of the other instead of the positive affirmation of its own difference which makes it a reactive mode of being: dialectics re-acts in the presence of otherness or difference; [6] finally, in dialectics "the abstract thought of contradiction… prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of aggression".

Adorno's negative dialectics

What is dialectics for Adorno? Very early on in his book *Negative Dialectics*, he provides a preliminary designation:

> The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into: it is not of the essence in a Heraclitean sense. It indicates the untruth of

17 Allan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: a Genealogy of Poststructuralism.* (New York-London: Routledge, 1995), 60.

18 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 162.

> identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.[19]

In this formulation, it is claimed that the objects are always *more* than their concepts give away, that the concepts are missing part of the objects they refer to. However, this excess/lack relation works both ways: it is also that the concept is, at the same time, more than the object it refers to, that the object does not live up to its concept: it is *less*.[20] The most lucid description of the untruthfulness and problematic nature of identifying is offered in Adorno's posthumously and relatively recently published in English (2008), *Lectures on Negative Dialectics:*

> Thus by subsuming them all under this concept, by saying that A is everything that is comprehended in this unity, I necessarily include countless characteristics that are *not* integrated into the individual elements contained in the concept. The concept is always less than what is subsumed in this concept. When a B is defined as A, it is always also *different from* and *more than* the A, the concept under which it is subsumed by way of a particular judgment. On the other hand, however, in a sense, every concept is, at the same time, more than the characteristics that are subsumed under it. If, for example, I think and speak of "freedom," this concept is not simply the unity of the characteristics of all the individuals who can be defined as free on the basis of a formal freedom within a given constitution. … the concept freedom contains a pointer to something that goes well beyond those specific freedoms, without our necessarily realizing what this additional element amounts to.[21]

However, thought and knowledge cannot exist without concepts. For Adorno, immediate and intuitive knowledge, knowledge without reason does not qualify as thought, while thought is bounded in the confines of what Adorno calls "conceptual totality."[22] Conceptual totality, however,

19 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York, London: Continuum, 2007), 5.

20 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 146.

21 Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics.* (Polity, 2008a), 7.

22 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

is "mere appearance," the "façade of immediacy" of brute facts.[23] It is the knowledge of essence, appearing in the cracks, in the "contradiction between what things are and what they claim to be"[24] that makes things what they are and gives us knowledge of them. The distinction between essence and appearance, Adorno notes, is retained in negative dialectics because, otherwise, we "side with appearance, with the total ideology which existence… become."[25] Here we had to make this brief reference as a step between what negative dialectics is and what it does:

> Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity. Since that totality is structured to accord with logic, however, whose core is the principle of the excluded middle,[26] whatever will not fit this principle, whatever differs in quality, comes to be designated as a contradiction. Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity.[27]

The relation between concepts and between concepts and objects is structured to accord with the rules of the mind, with logic. Now, these rules are the rules of identity thinking that demand that A cannot be A and not A simultaneously. Since the objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that as a matter of fact they are always A and not A simultaneously, concepts will always appear as contradictory from the point of view of identity thinking: "contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity."

The demand of non-contradictoriness does not belong to the object of cognition but is surrogated to it by thought. Here we can find the reason

23 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 167.

24 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 167.

25 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 169. Adorno defines ideology in one place as the "identity of concept and thing" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 40).

26 The "traditional norm of adequacy" mentioned in a previous quotation (above Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5) refers to the three basic principles of classical logic, one of which is the law of the "excluded middle" of this quotation. This principle states that either a proposition is true or its negation is true. The other two principles are the principle of identity (A is A) and the principle of non-contradiction (nothing can both, be and not be). They are all axioms of identity thinking.

27 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

why Adorno's thought appears and is groundless, judged by the standards of traditional, identity philosophy:

> …the Cartesian norm of explication [goes like this, NK]: reason for what follows…have to be found in what goes before. This norm is no longer compulsory. Measured by it, the dialectical state of facts is not explicable by a hierarchic schema of order summoned from outside. If it were, the attempt to explain would presuppose the explication that remains to be found; it would presuppose noncontradictoriness, the principle of subjective thinking, as inherent in the object which is to be thought.[28]

We cannot pre-decide on the foundation of our thought because this will blind us to the nature and truth of the object of cognition. We need to become able to penetrate the object and see what it is from the inside. There is no Atlas holding the sky on his shoulders, and we will do well, if we do not want to revert to mythology, to accept this level of relativity, contenting ourselves with tracing the next possible steps from the conceptual point in time and place we find ourselves to be: the contradiction we find in the object will tell us what is needed for moving beyond it, the next step, not some external criterion smuggled into the object from outside.[29] The acceptance of contradiction in the objects is negative dialectics' respect for its objects:

> In a sense, dialectical logic is more positivistic than the positivism that outlaws it. As thinking, dialectical logic respects that which is to be thought – the object – even where the object does not heed the rules of thinking. The analysis of the object is tangential to the rules of thinking. Thought need not be content with its own legality; without abandoning it, we can think

28 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 140.

29 Here we encounter an instance in which placing Critical Theory in the tradition of post-Kantian idealism leads us astray: Critical Theory is not looking for an "epistemic and normative surplus… over and above those heteronomous interests external to reason" as such placing leads Clarke and Hulatt to claim (James Clarke and Owen Hulatt, "Critical theory as a legacy of post-Kantianism", *British Journal of the history of philosophy*, 22 no, 6, (2014): 1056). Its epistemic claim is the disparity between what things are and what they are claimed to be, and its "normative surplus" is derived from this disparity itself.

> against our thought, and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be a definition worth suggesting.[30]

The embrace of the contradictoriness of objects revealed by dialectical thinking is its attempt to stay truthful to its objects and, in this sense, is more positivistic than positivism. In this passage, we need to pay attention to the fact that dialectical thought "is tangential," meaning peripheral, "to the rules of thinking"; it operates "without abandoning" thought's own legality, i.e., without abandoning identity thinking completely, and this is why those accusing Adorno of abandoning (traditional) reason are mistaken, as we will see shortly. The main point of this passage, however, is to alert us to the fact that negative dialectics mediates between two worlds: the world of external, objective reality and the world of internal, subjective thought, a point which becomes more explicit in the following passage:

> In fact, dialectics is neither a pure method nor a reality in the naïve sense of the word. It is not a method, for the unreconciled matter – lacking precisely the identity surrogated by the thought – is contradictory and resists any attempt at unanimous interpretation.[31] It is the matter, not the organizing drive of thought, that brings us to dialectics. Nor is dialectics a simple reality, for contradictoriness is a category of reflection, the cognitive confrontation of concept and thing.[32]

Contradiction, one of the central categories of negative dialectics, is the bridge between these two worlds: it is a category of reflection that most accurately describes an objective reality and is found in this reality despite the fact that reflection outlaws it. This is why "thinking against our thought" is an accurate second definition of dialectics that Adorno provides.

30 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141.

31 This is why a "positive standard of judgment" to judge between conflicting ideas of freedom or equality demanded in Held's perspective is impossible on this, first level of reflection: objects and reality are contradictory and resist "any attempt of unanimous interpretation". If, however, we unanimously recognize the contradictoriness of reality and of objects, then the way is opened to designate the direction in which we have to move in order to lift this contradictoriness, our next step mentioned above. This is taking place in a second level of reflection that negative dialectics invites us to undertake.

32 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 144.

Without identity thinking, negative dialectics has no material on which to work on: "[n]egative dialectics is thus tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure. Thus, too, it remains false according to identitarian logic: it remains the thing against which it is conceived."[33] Identity thinking is the necessary basis on the shoulders of which a second, higher order of reflection is needed to distinguish between its truth content and its ideological shell. This idea is also conveyed when Adorno states that contradiction arises only through identification: "[w]ithout the step that Being is the same as Nothingness, each of them would – to use one of Hegel's favorite terms – be "indifferent" to the other; only when they are to be the same do they become contradictory."[34] What is more, the longing for identity, the longing of the concept to become identical to its object, is also preserved in negative dialectics:

> To define identity as the correspondence of the thing-in-itself to its concept is hubris; but the idea of identity must not simply be discarded. Living in the rebuke that the thing is not identical with the concept is the concept's longing to become identical with the thing. This is how the sense of nonidentical contains identity.[35]

The longing for identity, which is preserved in negative dialectics, is also its critical edge: it is this longing which deems the contradiction unacceptable and calls for its overcoming, calls for an identity that "is not yet."[36]

It is this same critical edge that animates negative dialectics, what animates immanent critique as well. As Jarvis notes: "[i]mmanent critique

33 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 147. This turn of phrase can be seen as an anticipation of the criticism leveled by Habermas (Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. (Polity Press, 2007), xv; Jürgen Habermas, "The entwinement of myth and enlightenment: re-reading the Dialectic of Enlightenment", *New German Critique*, 26 (1982): 22) that Adorno departs from reason and his thought suffers from a "performative contradiction": negative dialectics "remains false according to identitarian logic."

34 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 157.

35 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 149.

36 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 151. Therefore, it is not the contradiction in the object alone that points to the next step of historical development, as we implied earlier, but the contradiction in the object in conjunction with the longing of the concept to become identical with the thing.

starts out from the principles of the work under discussion itself" and "it uses the internal contradictions of a body of work to criticize it in its own terms."[37] This means that it is the difference between what a work claims to do and what it is actually doing, the nonidentity between them, that immanent critique is aiming at. In fact, we argue that negative dialectics and immanent critique are one and the same, two different names for the same critical process. This connection is clear in the following passage where Adorno describes the operation of dialectics in the terms Jarvis uses for immanent critique: "[t]o the fundamental ontologist, relativism is the offense of bottomless thinking. Dialectics is as strictly opposed to that as to absolutism, but it does not seek a middle ground between the two; it opposes them through the extremes themselves, convicts them of untruth by their own ideas."[38]

What is more, in the course of *Negative Dialectics*, we have an excellent and lucid example of negative dialectics as immanent critique in practice: the critique of the bourgeois ideal of freedom: "[p]hilosophy," Adorno writes, "had an unexpressed mandate from the bourgeoisie to find transparent grounds for freedom. But that concern is antagonistic in itself. It goes against the old oppression and promotes the new one, the one that hides in the principle of rationality itself."[39] In its Kantian version, this mandate turns freedom into obedience: "[a]ll the concepts whereby the *Critique of Practical Reason* proposes, in honor of freedom, to fill the chasm between the Imperative and mankind – law, constraint, respect, duty – all of these are repressive. Causality produced by freedom corrupts freedom into obedience."[40] This self-contradictory mandate of bourgeois philosophy regarding freedom is also the cause for the antinomy of Kant's moral philosophy:

> This is largely why the imperative, stripped of all empiricism, is put forth as a "fact" that need not be tested by reason, de-

37 Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Polity Press, 1998): 5.

38 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 35.

39 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 214.

40 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 232.

> spite the *chorismos* between idea and factuality. The antinomical character of the Kantian doctrine of freedom is exacerbated to the point where the moral law seems to be regarded as directly rational and as not rational – as rational, because it is reduced to pure logical reason without content, and as not rational because it must be accepted as given and cannot be further analyzed, because every attempt at analysis is anathema. This antinomical character should not be laid at the philosopher's door: the pure logic of consistency, its compliance with self-preservation without self-reflection, is unreasonable and deluded in itself. The *ratio* turns into irrational authority.[41]

What is argued in this passage is a case where the bourgeois claim to promote freedom is revealed to be at odds with itself and promoting obedience instead; the same with rationality: the claim of the moral law to be rational is revealed to stand on a fundamental irrationality: Kant's categorical imperative cannot be proved but has to be accepted as an axiom. This example, we think, illustrates vividly that negative dialectics and immanent critique are one and the same thing. This point is important because, in the secondary literature, this identity goes undiscerned and causes confusion to some commentators.[42]

To return to the theme of the preservation of identity thinking in negative dialectics, it can be said that identity thinking is capturing what is referred to as "intelligible forms" of objects. Adorno's view about the intelligible forms comes, as Stone notes, from Hegel: "'The general assurance that…insights, cognitions are "merely subjective" ceases to convince as soon as subjectivity is grasped as the object's form', as it is by Hegel."[43] And she also goes on to note that Adorno takes a step further than He-

41 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 261.

42 This is the case with How and Finlayson, who discern a transposition in Adorno from the immanent critique of the 1930s to negative dialectics after the 1940s (1950s for Finlayson) (Alan How, *Critical Theory* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), 41; Gordon J. Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism", *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 22, no. 6, (2014): 1157).

43 Alison Stone, "Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic", *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (2014): 1129. Quotation inside the quotation is from Adorno's *Subject and Object*.

gel by accusing him that he "wrongly reduces the object to its intelligible form," a reduction that makes him an identity thinker.[44] Intelligible forms are real; they are not arbitrary projections of the mind onto objects. They appear so only if we abstract from the hundreds of thousands of years of the history of the formation of human perception, including the formation of our mind, through the constant exchange with nature in a social context. As Horkheimer observes:

> Even the way they see and hear is inseparable from the social life-process as it has evolved over the millennia. The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity, and yet the individual perceives himself as receptive and passive in the act of perception.[45]

If intelligible forms were arbitrary projections of the mind onto the objects, if objective reality was chaotic, then, as Adorno observes, "the domination of nature would never have succeeded."[46] The success of a science informed by logic and identity thinking in mastering nature would be inexplicable. However, this historical formation of perception and of the mind consists in training them in the ways that can more effectively manipulate the environment and other men. To the extent that they claim to exhaust all there is to know about the objects, they do falsify the objects.

Identity thinking and formal logic, as intelligible forms, are not abandoned by dialectical thinking. Horkheimer again reminds us that:

> The traditional type of theory, one side of which finds expression in formal logic, is in its present form part of the produc-

44 Stone, "Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic", 1129.

45 Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 200.

46 Cited in Peter Dews, "Adorno, Post-Structuralism and the Critique of Identity", *New Left Review*, I no. 157 (1986): 38; also in Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner*, (State University of New York Press, 1999), 83.

> tion process with its division of labor. Since society must come to grips with nature in the future ages as well, this intellectual technology will not become irrelevant but on the contrary is to be developed as fully as possible.[47]

Intelligible forms and identity thinking form part of the inescapable metabolism with nature and cannot but be retained. They are retained for the additional reason that negative dialectics is dependent on them as its point of departure; it "feeds" upon their inaccuracy and inadequacy in the exchange with nature and other men, revealing this inaccuracy and inadequacy.

So far, we secretly kept our eyes fixed on the concept of contradiction and tried to unfold Adorno's negative dialectics from this point of view. Let us now turn to another fundamental concept for negative dialectics, that of negativity, and see what negative dialectics looks like from this perspective.

First of all, why is negative dialectics called negative? Negative dialectics goes against the grain of dialectics hitherto, which was to construct something positive through negation, a point that marks a radical difference between Adorno and Hegel. In fact, consideration of negativity in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* is tied up and goes hand in hand with his critique of Hegel. The most general difference in disposition and direction is captured when Adorno writes that "[d]ialectics is critical reflection upon [the] context of immanence" while in Hegel, "there was coincidence of identity and positivity."[48] Because, as we mentioned above, the conceptual totality appears from the point of view of nonidentity thinking to be wholly immersed in falseness and the ideology of identity, nonidentity thinking takes a critical stance against this totality (conceptual as well as actual) and has to negate identity; Hegel's operation, on the other hand, leads into the affirmation of this totality.[49]

47 Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", 216.

48 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141.

49 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 147.

In the same direction is Adorno's observation that "[a] contradiction in reality is a contradiction against reality."[50] Contradiction arises, as we said, because of the false identification of concept and object. The detection of a contradiction in reality carries with it the implicit demand for the removal of this contradiction, of premature identification, to create the space for the possibility of materializing the longing for (true) identity. However, Adorno goes on, "such dialectics is no longer reconcilable with Hegel. Its motion does not tend to the identity in the difference between each object and its concept; instead, it is suspicious of all identity."[51]

We should not be taken aback by the paradoxical position presented here: negative dialectics is "suspicious of all identity," it negates (premature) identity, but this negation is not an end in itself. It is justified by the prospect of incorporating the nonidentical elements of the object into the concept, by the prospect of achieving true identity. However, we need to be aware of the magnitude of the task, namely, that this "true identity" means no less than acquiring access to what Kant called "thing in itself," which Adorno considers as "hubris." So, we should be wary before proclaiming a "happy grasp on affirmation" of identity. The difficulty of our presentational provocation is the difficulty of negative dialectics itself.

How are we going to get access to the nonidentical element in the object? Adorno answers this question by first clarifying how we are not going to get access to it:

> The nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel. …To equate negation of negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its purest form. What thus wins out in the inmost core of dialectics is the antidialectical principle: that traditional logic which, *more arithmetico*, takes minus times minus for plus.[52]

50 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 145.

51 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 145.

52 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158.

So, we see that Adorno directly confronts and rejects Hegel's negation of negation as "the quintessence of identification," noting that "[t]he structure of [Hegel's] system would unquestionably fall without the principle that to negate negation is positive."[53] The answer he offers to our question is that negative's "only positive side would be criticism, definite negation; it would not be a circumventing result with a happy grasp on affirmation."[54] It is through criticism, the famous or infamous "determinate negation," that access to the nonidentical or to "the otherness," is acquired.

Here we reach a crucial, as well as controversial, point in Adorno's thought. If it is true that, according to his thought, negative dialectics cannot but start its operation from the conceptual totality, and this totality is structured according to identity thinking, and therefore is false, then, indeed, it seems that negation of identity is the only way to break through the façade of ideology. In this perspective, determinate negation denies the identity between the concept and its object by bringing to the surface the disparity, the contradiction between them: i.e., by bringing to the surface how the concept fails to incorporate the non-conceptual remainder of the object and/or how the object fails to live up to the concept's expectations, to materialize the possibilities of the concept. Both concept and object are defined in this process through the recognition of the contradiction that animates them since "the factors that define reality as antagonistic are the same factors as those which constrain [the] mind, i.e., the concept, and force it into its intrinsic contradictions."[55] The "truth content" of philosophical categories is the social experiences, the human practice, locked within them[56] and deciphering this content defines both them and the society in which they are born or used. As Adorno notes, "[t]he only way to pass philosophically into social categories is to deci-

53 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 160.

54 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 159.

55 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 9.

56 Werner Bonefeld, (2009). "Emancipatory praxis and conceptuality in Adorno", in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, ed. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros and Sergio Tischler, (Pluto Press, 2009), 139.

pher the truth content of philosophical categories."[57] Hence, the adjective "determinate" that characterizes this kind of negation.

The mode of philosophizing which emerges out of this universe is one which is confined and exhausted in determinate negation in two senses: as a ruthless critique of "what is" and unreconcilable opposition to the status quo, as well as a refusal to clearly point to a way out, to point to an alternative way to organize social life. This is why Adorno has been severely criticized for his acute pessimism, for his unwillingness to offer the slightest trace of affirmation of anything.[58]

We think that there is real cause for these accusations, which is revealed when the issue comes to the problem of affirmation of life: if the value of life is not affirmed in one sense or another under all circumstances, we have no chance to fence against the degradation of it and against murder. Here is not the place to discuss this side of the issue extensively; we will do that a little later. But we want to point out how these accusations can be addressed without stepping out of the universe of negative dialectics. The starting point is the observation that if the bases of the nonidentity thesis is that "A is A and A is not A simultaneously," then the nonidentity thesis incorporates an affirmative moment: it initially affirms that A is A, which is simultaneously negated. In the perspective of the relation between concept and object, this affirmative moment takes the form of the recognition that we start from the point of identity thinking: we recognize that the conceptual totality is structured according to identity, and we simultaneously negate this totality as ideological and false. In effect, we say that "*there is an identity between concept and object but this identity is false*." In the same way, when the issue comes to the affirmation of life, the nonidentity thesis should be that we recognize the value of life, but the form and content of this value as it now stands is false. In effect, we say, "*there is a value of life but this value is false*." The attentive reader

57 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 198.

58 Buck-Morss, *The origin of Negative Dialectics*, 190; Osborne, "A Marxism for the postmodern?", 190; Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 382-383; Thompson, "From Negative Dialectics to Critical Metaphysics".

will, perhaps, observe that there is a difference between the two formulations: while in the second formulation, we want to preserve the positive value of life (the first part of the formulation), in the first formulation, we could not possibly want to preserve the identity between concept and object (again the first part of the formulation) because this would be tantamount to wanting to preserve ideology and the status quo. However, if in Adorno's thought, identity thinking is retained as the starting point of negative dialectics, i.e., of the critique of the claim of this identity to exhaust the object, *and as capturing the intelligible forms of the objects,* which means that identity thinking *does capture some real* aspects of the object, then the situation is reversed: it is not the affirmation that life has a value which is problematic from the point of view of negative dialectics but the rejection of such affirmation! More reasons why we so badly want to preserve the affirmation of the value of life in the present and under all circumstances will be presented later. They have to do with Nietzsche's intention to safeguard a healthy self-esteem, as a necessary precondition for overcoming nihilism. For now, we will just say that this affirmative moment at the heart of the nonidentity thesis goes unacknowledged by Adorno (for reasons we will also discuss in that section) but has the potential of mounting a defense of negative dialectics against one of the most persistent and severe criticisms against its extreme negativism by incorporating this criticism's truth content without compromising its own critical edge.

The challenge of Deleuze's critique of dialectics that can be afforded by Adorno's negative dialectics

Having presented both Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics and, in broad strokes, Adorno's negative dialectics, we will now develop the conversation between the two philosophers, which will take the form of the challenge of Deleuze's critique that can be afforded by Adorno's negative dialectics. We will start with Adorno's first preliminary definition of negative dialectics: "Objects do not go into their concepts without

leaving a remainder."[59] Deleuze entertains the same idea, even if it is expressed somewhat differently: "The concept is the same – indefinitely the same – for objects which are distinct. We must therefore recognise the existence of non-conceptual differences between these objects."[60] If two distinct objects have the same concept, this is only because their concept is missing out the differential element of these objects, Adorno's "remainder." This is essentially a Nietzschean idea, the idea that the concepts of identity thinking "falsify reality",[61] that both of our authors have in common. However, their response to it differs: while Deleuze's next step is to give up conceptual thinking and try to construct the idea of "difference without a concept",[62] Adorno sticks to conceptual thinking and says that "[a]ware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity."[63] We need to note here that Adorno's response seems to us more Nietzschean than Deleuze's. Nietzsche, in the passage referred to above, contends that "to renounce false judgments would be to renounce life, would be to deny life. …and a philosophy which ventures to do so [i.e., not to renounce false judgments, NK] places itself, by that act alone, beyond good and evil."[64] Identity thinking and its concepts cannot just be given up the way Deleuze suggests because this would be detrimental to the preservation of the species.

Now, we need to observe that despite this difference between Deleuze and Adorno, they both join forces again in criticizing contradiction in the context of their critique against Hegel, whose thought they consider an

59 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

60 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16.

61 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* (Penguin Books, 1990), 35.

62 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 16.

63 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

64 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* 35-36. The difference between Adorno and Nietzsche on this point is that for Nietzsche, the subject is in this way constitutive of the world; while for Adorno, is merely capturing the world's intelligible forms. Nietzsche, in this respect, is victim of the "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" for Adorno.

expression of identity thinking: Adorno holds that since the conceptual totality "is structured to accord with logic… whose core is the principle of the excluded middle, whatever will not fit this principle, whatever differs in quality, comes to be designated as a contradiction. Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity."[65] Deleuze agrees when he says that "…difference implies the negative, and allows itself to lead to contradiction, only to the extent that its subordination to the identical is maintained."[66] So, both Adorno and Deleuze criticize (Hegel's) contradiction as an expression of identity thinking. And this is not all. In an astonishingly similar fashion, they both argue that the principle of non-contradiction is inserted in the world of objects from the "outside" as it were. It is a requirement of our reason rather than an element of "the existent," as Deleuze puts it.[67] The astonishing thing is not that there is an agreement between Adorno and Deleuze; it is again the Nietzschean argument that the mind falsifies reality, mentioned above, that is at play here. The astonishing thing is that such an agreement has gone unnoticed in the literature, as far as we know.[68]

The difference between Deleuze and Adorno on this point is that while Deleuze refers to the difference between two objects, Adorno refers to the difference between one object and its concept: contradiction is detected in different contexts in Deleuze and Adorno. Why is that? It is evident from what we have said so far that this difference reflects the different direction each of them is taking as a response to the common recognition that there is no identity between concept and object: The first abandons conceptual thinking and turns towards the ontology of difference, while the second does not give up on conceptual thinking and tries to trace a path through the problem of nonidentity between concept and object. This difference in direction is reflected in the different paths that they follow after their brief reencounter in the critique of contradiction.

65 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

66 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xv.

67 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 63; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 140.

68 With the exception of Bonnet. See Bonnet, "Antagonism and Difference", 46.

Deleuze's next step is to break contradiction into the differences of which it consists and try to think through the object on this level as a play of differences.[69] Adorno, on the other hand, seems, still following Nietzsche, to take the stand that it is impossible to avoid the falsification of reality by the mind, but it is possible to think against the rules of the mind, to "think against our thought."[70]

To leave the matter here, however, would be misleading. For Adorno, it may be that contradiction *first* emerges as a contradiction between the concept and its object, but the embrace of contradictoriness in spite of the fact that the rules of the mind do not allow it, is a respect of thought for its object; the actual source of contradiction is in the object itself:

> In a sense, dialectical logic is more positivistic than the positivism that outlaws it. As thinking, dialectical logic respects that which is to be thought – the object – even where the object does not heed the rules of thinking. The analysis of the object is tangential to the rules of thinking. Thought need not be content with its own legality; without abandoning it, we can think against our thought, and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be a definition worth suggesting.[71]

The dual character of contradiction in Adorno, as already noted, is an expression of the peculiar position it occupies as the nodal point between the rules of identity thinking, internal and subjective, and the external reality of objects.

At this point, we must emphasize again that for Adorno, identity thinking is not abandoned but serves as the starting point of dialectical reflection: "Negative dialectics is thus tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure. Thus, too, it remains false according to identitarian logic: it remains the thing against which it is conceived."[72] We also have to note again that identity thinking for Adorno captures what Hegel called the "intelligible forms" of the ob-

69 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 63.

70 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141.

71 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141.

72 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 147.

jects. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the world of identity thinking is unreal, an "only simulated" world: "The modern world is one of simulacra. Man did not survive God, nor did the identity of the subject survive that of substance. All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical "effect" [simulacra, NK] by the more profound game of difference and repetition."[73] However, if identity thinking was unreal and totally arbitrary, its success in mastering nature would be inexplicable. There has to be something real in the objects which is captured by identity thinking, which must be at least as important and archaic as difference is. Adorno's thought, by recognizing this fact (weakly truth be told) and by arguing that the problem with identity thinking is its claim to exhaust the object, when it actually does not, incorporates a wider range of the "existent" than Deleuze's theorizing.

Determinate negation is Adorno's proposed method to access this nonidentical, non-conceptual "otherness" of the concept, and from our analysis so far, it must be clear that dialectics, at least Adorno's dialectics, does not commence with a negation of the other, as Deleuze has it; rather a negation of itself, of the identity between concept and object, which is reaching out for the otherness of the concept in the object, is involved. In this case, what Deleuze writes for Bergson applies to Adorno too: "In Bergson…the thing differs with itself *in the first place, immediately*. According to Hegel, the thing differs from itself because it differs in the first place from all that it is not."[74]

Adorno and Deleuze do not differ only in that the first retains identity thinking as the starting point of negative dialectics and as capturing the intelligible forms of the object, which the second rejects as unreal; they also differ in that Adorno also retains the longing for identity as the

73 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xv.

74 Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference", in *The New Bergson,* ed. John Mullarkey, (Manchester University Press, 1999), 53. The term "immediately" here should be understood as meaning without the mediation of a second object, like "nothingness" in relation to "being" in Hegel. This clarification is needed because the difference of the concept from its object in Adorno is not immediate but always mediated through concepts: "...Entity is not immediate… it is only through the concept," Adorno notes (see Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 153).

end point of negative dialectics. This demand for the preservation of the longing for identity is a crucial, in our view, difference between Adorno and Deleuze. Its significance is brought to light if we think of the critique of identity not in examples taken from the natural world but in examples taken from the social world: what does the critique of identity mean in the case of a concept such as freedom, for instance? It means that the concept of freedom is not presently in agreement with each and every individual, that we are not yet free, or, in other words, the concept of freedom is more than the object of freedom, its human embodiments; it also means that the freedom one enjoys is not the same as the freedom another enjoys, in the same way as no leaf is the same as any other. In other words, the object of freedom, its human embodiments, is more than the concept of freedom. If we discard the longing for identity and view the situation as a mere difference (as Deleuze does) and not as a contradiction (as Adorno does) then this situation is no longer implicitly evaluated as unacceptable. The critical edge of thought on the object is lost entirely or, at the very least, neutralized completely.[75] Therefore, Gunn is right when he observes that "empiricist abstraction, from Thales' contention that everything is really water onwards, has sought to defuse contradiction by assimilating it to the *difference* (the reciprocal *in*difference) of terms hanging in some genus/species string."[76]

Before we move on to tackle Deleuze's Nietzsche-inspired critique of dialectics, we need to develop the argument in another direction, away from Adorno's own thought: in the direction of the role of affirmation in Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Adorno. This development will equip us with a better grasp of the defense that Adorno's thought can mount against Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics.

75 This example also illustrates how a possible unanimity of the acceptance of the contradictoriness of the concepts and of reality can pave the way for a definition of freedom concrete enough to be used as a guide for political action.

76 Richard Gunn, (1992). "Against Historical Materialism: Marxism as a First-order Discourse", in *Open Marxism vol. II*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, Kosmas Psychopedis, (Pluto Press, 1992), 27.

Nonidentity concept of life: the simultaneous affirmation and negation of the value of life in the present

We mentioned above that dialectics, Adorno's dialectics, does not commence with a negation of the other, as Deleuze has it; rather, a negation of itself reaching out for its otherness is involved. But dialectics as "the consistent sense of nonidentity" cannot be pure negation, as Adorno has it, either. There is an affirmative moment inscribed at the heart of the nonidentity thesis, which goes unacknowledged by Adorno himself. Acknowledging this moment can help us to amend the charge of Adorno's extreme pessimism without leaving the ground of negative dialectics. It also affords a response to Deleuze's Nietzschean charge against dialectics as animated by ressentiment and nihilism. How can this be?

In a nutshell, we would say again that the nonidentity position in epistemology reads like this: "there is an identity between concept and object, but this identity is false"; regarding the affirmation of life, we said that the nonidentity thesis should be something like the proposition: "there is a value of life but this value is false." A more sociologically-oriented formulation would be to say that it amounts to the negation of the particular sociohistorical conditions of life at the same time when it affirms the value of "life as a phenomenon," i.e., it affirms that being alive, no matter what the sociohistorical manifestations are, has an intrinsic value.

Let us start unfolding the thought of the possibility and necessity for nonidentity thinking of the affirmation of "life as a phenomenon," by hearing again what Deleuze's Nietzschean charge against dialectics consists of. The problem that Deleuze identifies in dialectics is that it uses the negation of the "other" instead of the affirmation of its own difference as its starting point. In this respect, Deleuze quotes *Genealogy of Morals,* where Nietzsche writes: "While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside', what is 'different' what is 'not itself' and this No is its creative deed."[77] And

77 Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals", 36; cited in Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philoso-*

Deleuze adds: "This is why Nietzsche presents the dialectic as the speculation of the pleb, as the way of thinking of the slave: the abstract thought of contradiction then prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of aggression."[78] In a word, dialectics is condemned "as the ideology of *ressentiment*."[79] However, as already mentioned, the problem with a mode of thinking under the sway of ressentiment resides, above all, in its nihilistic consequences, i.e., to the fact that brings along with it a "denying [of] life" and a "depreciation of existence,"[80] the nihilistic consequences of dialectics and of ressentiment, that is, the *psychological inability* (note the phrase "concrete *feeling*" Deleuze uses in the above quotation) of the people operating under their sway to affirm life. We already argued that in Adorno's negative dialectics, a negation of itself reaching out for its otherness is rather involved, and this saves his dialectics from the accusation of being an essentially reactive mode of thinking where the initiative belongs to the external "other" against which dialectical thinking re-acts. But this is still a negation and not an affirmation, as the critique requires. It seems to us that Nietzsche and Deleuze really strike a sensitive and productive chord at this point which can be illustrated if we introduce Adorno's response to these allegations. Gillian Rose summarises this response as follows:

> For Adorno 'life' could not be affirmed as something apart from the life of a culture or society and its possibilities. Nietzsche in this sense had no concept of theory or society. Adorno too seeks to affirm 'life' but, given the present society, to affirm life is to affirm that society and thus a 'life that does not live.' Adorno instead affirms hope for a 'life (that is a society) which lives.' He accuses Nietzsche of bowing down before 'the powers that be' and of denying the validity of the hope that existence might be better.[81]

phy, 10.

78 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 10.

79 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 212.

80 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 34.

81 Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno.* (London-New York: Verso, 2014), 33.

It seems to us that Adorno here is unable or unwilling to distinguish between the affirmation of "life as phenomenon" and the affirmation of the particular sociohistorical form that life is happening to have. This is apparently because, for him, there can be no "life in the abstract." However, we have to observe that his conviction comes as a result and refers to the level of rationality and conscious reasoning, while Nietzsche and Deleuze refer to the level of the dynamic of unconscious forces and their manifestations. The affirmation of life they are talking about refers to the unconscious constitution of psychological forces and not to the rational processes of reasoning. This is so because the theory of active and reactive forces and of the will to power, which form the bases of Nietzsche's thought, for Nietzsche himself as well as for Deleuze, are theories pertaining, and best understood as pertaining, to the psychological constitution of beings.[82] On the other hand, Nietzsche and Deleuze are not able or willing to make the above distinction either. This is why they consider the negation of the other as, by definition, reactive. They fail to see that it is possible for the negation of the existing form of society or life to be fuelled precisely by the affirmation of the value of "life as a phenomenon." So, both camps go on to exchange relatively equally half-justified "courtesies." Dialectics, it seems to us, *can potentially but not necessarily entail* ressentiment and reaction. On the other hand, affirmation of life as a phenomenon *can potentially but not necessarily result* in compliance with the existing status quo. The fact that there is nothing in negation per se that

82 For Nietzsche, psychology is the "queen of the sciences": "…The psychologist…will at least be entitled to demand in return that psychology shall again be recognized as the queen of the sciences, to serve and prepare for which the other sciences exist. For psychology is now once again the road to the fundamental problems" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* 54); will to power, like Freud's libido, "is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 366). For Deleuze, "The will to power is the differential element of forces, that is to say the element that produces the differences in quantity between two or more forces…" (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 52-53); and "What a will wants, depending on its quality, is to affirm its difference or to deny what differs" (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 78). The paramount quality of will to power is the affirmation of its own difference, if it is affirmative will to power, or to negate what differs if it is negative will to power. Affirmation for them pertains to psychology not to social theory.

is inherently reactive is amply illustrated by Deleuze himself towards the end of his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* when, in the context of the constitution of the overman, he says: "There is no affirmation which is not *immediately followed* by a negation no less tremendous and unbounded than itself. …There is no affirmation which is not preceded by an immense negation…"[83] This impossibility to avoid negation in the process of the emergence of the overman is a strange subversion of both the Deleuzean critique of dialectics and the Adornean critique of Nietzsche!

Karin Bauer, in a vein similar to Rose's, summarizes Adorno's relevant critique against Nietzsche as follows: "For Adorno, the affirmation of life is synonymous with the affirmation of the degrading conditions of human existence and the false reality created under capitalism and by extension fascism. Synonymous with conformity, the affirmation of life is under the present circumstances no longer possible."[84] The implications of this critique are vividly presented on the occasion of Nietzsche's idea of eternal return: the interpretation of affirmation of life in eternal return as affirmation of every single event that has ever happened and will happen, an interpretation which Adorno shares with some contemporary commentators, constitutes the difficulty of the thought of eternal return, a difficulty formulated powerfully by Gillespie: "To will the eternal recurrence means not merely to accept the murder and torture of children as necessary, but also to commit those murders and to carry out that torture, and *to want to do so*. The superman, in this sense, is infinitely distant from the innocence of the child."[85] However, Ansell-Pearson argues that in the eternal return, only the singularity of time returns, meaning by that the indeterminacy of the creative moment:

> What the spirit of gravity cannot grasp [regarding eternal return, NK] is the teaching on time that Zarathustra's vision and

83 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 177.

84 Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives*, 98.

85 Michael, A. Gillespie, ""Slouching toward Bethlehem to be born": On the nature and meaning of Nietzsche's superman", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 30, (2005): 63; See also Christopher Hamilton, "Nietzsche on Nobility and the Affirmation of Life", *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice,* 3 no. 2 (2000): 190.

> the riddle confronts him with. The gaze of the spirit is focused on the circle and not on that which makes the circle come into being or appear as such. The eternal return of the same is the definition of that which comes in a manner that is innocent and wanton: the singularity of time always comes *the same*. There is no contradiction between the singularity of things and their eternal return simply because what comes back is the innocence of becoming (the moment liberated from the woe of time's pastness).[86]

We want to argue that the contradiction between these two views can be fruitfully conceptualized as a dialectical contradiction. On a first level, if we see Ansell-Pearson's case as a case of affirmation of the value of "life as a phenomenon" and Adorno, Gillespie, and Hamilton, as proposing a negation of life's specific sociohistorical manifestation, then when we are considering affirmation of the value of "life as a phenomenon," eternal return can appear as the return of the "innocence of becoming," of the singularity of time. When we are considering affirmation of life as affirmation of life's sociohistorical specificity, eternal return can appear as return of all the horrors and destruction too. In Nietzsche's own thought, both views seem to coexist independently of each other. He is reluctant to discard affirmation of specific sociohistorical manifestations of life not, or at least not only, because his thought is reactionary at this point, but also, and we think predominantly, because he knows that in order for one to affirm their personal life, psychologically, they have to come to terms with their past, to affirm their past in its entirety, its good and its bad – no matter how bad – moments. The same, he thinks, applies to the human race as a species, i.e., to history. As he writes in his notes of *The Will to Power*: "…For everything is so bound up with everything else, that to want to exclude something means to exclude everything. A reprehensible action means: a reprehensible world –."[87] The past cannot be changed, and the only thing we can do if we are to affirm the present is to

86 Keith Ansell-Pearson, Keith, "The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: the Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies,* 30, (2005): 16-17.

87 Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* 165.

accept it, more, to will it, if we are to affirm fully our present. However, this "willing of the past" does not mean, as Gillespie unwarrantedly infers, to *want* to commit and *actually committing* the murder and torture of children, but only to recognize the fact that this torture and this murder cannot be undone, and magnanimously, in a tragic fashion, embrace life in spite of it.

On a second level, these thoughts open Nietzsche up to Adorno's critique that the present, the twisted and alienating present, cannot and should not be affirmed. At this point, the usefulness of understanding life in a nonidentity, dialectical manner reveals itself as it allows for affirmation simultaneously with negation: It allows for the possibility to negate the particular sociohistorical form that life happens to have together with affirmation of the value of "life as a phenomenon." Adorno would have retorted, following Marx, that there is no such thing as affirmation of life in the abstract, there is no life separated from its sociohistorical manifestations, in the same way as there is no such thing as abstract labor. However, such an approach leads to a dead end: If we are unable somehow to affirm the value of life under all circumstances, even under capitalism and fascism, then we have no way to argue against the degradation of life and murder. If life has no value at all under capitalism, why not kill each other? What is there to stop us from such actions? The value of humans? But humans, according to this argument, cannot be separated from the conditions in which they exist, and if these conditions are valueless, so are humans. In a surprising manner, Adorno's argument appears to imply a false identity between humans or life as concepts, and their objects (determinations), i.e., the sociohistorical manifestation that life is happening to have.[88] This identity is false because the concepts of "human

88 Owen Hulatt also makes the argument that Adorno is inconsistent on this point, albeit in a rather structuralistic fashion. (Owen Hulatt, "Modal and Epistemic Immodesty: An Incoherence in Adorno's Social Philosophy", *Constellations*, 23, no. 4 (2016): 482-483). Our argument will show that this inconsistency can be rectified without leaving the ground of negative dialectics, strengthening rather than "undermining" Adorno's "emphasis on non-identity" while the undermining of Adorno's, not only "ethical" (Hulatt, "Modal and Epistemic Immodesty", 491) negativism is considered in our argument, unlike in Hulatt's, a salutary rather than a regrettable consequence.

existence" or of "life as a phenomenon" are not exhausted in their specific sociohistorical manifestations, as Adorno's position presupposes. The sociohistorical manifestation that life is happening to have at a particular time and place on Earth is but a moment in the wider scheme of sociohistorical development of "life as a phenomenon," while humans are not exhausted in their facticity, their sociohistorical determinations. If they were exhausted in their facticity, human development and the observed ability of some humans to overcome their facticity within one and the same social formation would be impossible and inexplicable. Both "life as a phenomenon" and "human existence" are much more than their object: like the example of the case of freedom Adorno gives, they both "contain a pointer to something that goes well beyond those specific freedoms [the specific sociohistorical manifestations and the facticity of humans in our case, NK], without our necessarily realizing what this additional element amounts to."[89] When we affirm "life as a phenomenon," then, we affirm the value of the fact that there are living beings, humans amongst them, which organize their livelihoods in one way or another. This organization is historical in nature, and there is nothing definitive about it (this is the "innocence of becoming," which, in this respect, corresponds to the absence of a concrete realization of "what the additional element [of freedom, of sociohistorical manifestations, and of facticity, NK] amounts to"). At the same time, though, the concepts "life as a phenomenon" and "human existence" are less than their object: in order to subsume under these concepts all observed sociohistorical manifestations and all individuals, we must abstract from their individuality, the differential element that makes these sociohistorical manifestations and these individuals what they are and, consequently, makes them apart; in the case where "life as a phenomenon" and "human existence" are taken to be identical to their sociohistorical manifestations and human facticity respectively, we have to abstract from the variety of social formations,

89 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 7.

and from the individual complexions and adaptations of human beings within a specific social formation. For example, we will have to abstract from the difference between feudalism and capitalism and between the different reactions of individuals to capitalism and fascism; feudalism and capitalism, as well as both embracing and resistance to capitalism and fascism, are subsumed under the same concept of "life as a phenomenon" and of "human existence," respectively. If we are to follow Adorno's thought, we have to collapse into the worthlessness of "life that does not live," both the embracing of capitalism and fascism, *and* the resistance to them that did and is taking place! However, the fact of this collapse and of its impermissibility becomes visible only if we refer Adorno's thought to the identity moment that his thought implicitly presupposes, and the way to highlight it is to introduce the concepts of "life as a phenomenon" and of "human existence." Then, Adorno's own words can be used to criticize this identity moment: by subsuming all social formations and all individuals under the concepts of "life as a phenomenon" and "human existence," respectively, "by saying that A is everything that is comprehended in this unity, I necessarily include countless characteristics that are not integrated into the individual elements contained in the concept."[90] Namely, I collapse the differences between social formations, as well as I collapse the difference between embracing and resistance to capitalism and fascism in specific social formations. Adorno's position, as Rose explicates it, does collapse silently the difference between embrace of and resistance to capitalism and fascism into the worthlessness of "a life that does not live." A consistent negative dialectical position about the affirmation of life would be, we argue, to recognize the affirmative moment at the heart of the nonidentity thesis (as we did when we advanced the formulation of the nonidentity thesis by saying that it amounts to the proposition: "there is an identity between concept and object, but this identity is false"); then to construct the identity thesis about life implicit silently in Adorno's thought (by introducing the concept of "life as a phenomenon"), and finally, criticize

90 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 7.

it from the point of view of negative dialectics. We tried to go through all these steps above. The important key is Adorno's identification between the concept of life and the object of specific sociohistorical manifestations and our proposal to reframe this identity using the concept of "life as a phenomenon" defined as the existence of living beings which organize their livelihoods historically in one way or another. We see, then, how a distinction between "life as a phenomenon" and life's specific sociohistorical manifestations, missing from Adorno's thought, is possible, and what is more, is necessary for a consistent negative dialectical perspective concerning the affirmation and negation in the present of life as a phenomenon and life's sociohistorical manifestations.

Now, on the other hand, if, instead, we resort, like Caygill, to the point of view of the future by saying that it is the anticipation of the future communist society which gives value to the present, degrading "life that does not live,"[91] then we regress to a religious mode of thinking. We must be able to negate and affirm the value of life simultaneously in the present if we want to preserve the ability to mount a critique of this present and remain on secular ground.

However, these considerations are not the reasons why Nietzsche is concerned with the affirmation of life. His reasons are not social but psychological: affirmation of the value of life is, or should be, the basic psychological mood of the individual towards life, what we today call *self-esteem*,[92] i.e., the feeling of the joy of life possessed by almost all

91 Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015), 37-38.

92 Nietzsche argued that the triumph of ressentiment will be complete when the "fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said one another: "it is disgraceful to be fortunate: *there is too much misery!*"" (Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals", 124). From another passage of the *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals", 34), we get the information that the fortunate are the "powerful" and the "noble," while the unfortunate are the "poor," "impotent," "lowly," "suffering," "deprived," "sick," "ugly." These passages can be interpreted as both an apology of the status quo, since much of the misery, deprivation, and suffering they are inviting us to accept are man-made and amenable, *and simultaneously* as calling for the preservation of a healthy self-esteem of those who are not miserable, deprived, and suffering in the face of this misery, deprivation, and suffering.

children before the alienating society and upbringing takes it away from them, which is a necessary precondition for the overcoming of nihilism.[93] This feeling/attitude is, we think, what Nietzsche wants to preserve and what marks the difference between his "gay science" and Adorno's "melancholy science." The first moves in the region of psychology, and the second in the region of social theory. The psychological content of Nietzsche's affirmation of life is also a response to the Adornean charge that the concept of life in Nietzsche is without content, is abstract: it is not abstract, it is only that its content in Nietzsche is not social but psychological.[94]

The concept of "life as a phenomenon" is able to incorporate this psychological aspect in Nietzsche's affirmation of life: when we say that we affirm "life as a phenomenon," we affirm precisely the joy of living that stems from a healthy self-esteem able to embrace existence in spite of the tragedies of personal life and the horrors of history, in the same way as the affirmation of identity between the concept and object amounts, as we said in a previous section, to the affirmation of objects' *intelligible forms*, which are the domain of identity thinking. The concept of "life as a phenomenon," which we have criticized as suffering from the problems that any concept of identity thinking suffers, must nevertheless be retained, like identity thinking itself, because it captures a real and important aspect of the object of life's sociohistorical manifestations: the need for the retention of a healthy self-esteem in the face of these manifestations, which plays a key role in the appreciation of the intrinsic value of life under all circumstances.

93 On the significance and function of self-esteem, see Tony Humphreys' excellent *Self-esteem: the key to your child's education*. He points out there that one of the indicators or consequences of low self-esteem is that the person feels that life is not worth living (Tony Humphreys, *Self-esteem: the Key to your Child's Education* (Newleaf, 1996), 78-79).

94 Adorno's aversion towards the word 'life' is indicated by his view that what is denoted with the biological category "life" is actually a social thing: "The anarchy in the production of goods is a manifestation of the social primitivity that vibrates in the word "life," in the use of a biological category for a thing that is social in essence" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 262-263).

The challenge of Deleuze's critique of dialectics that can be afforded by Adorno's negative dialectics (continued)

We can now pick up again the thread of Deleuze's Nietzsche-inspired critique of dialectics. We can see where the criticisms that dialectics misinterprets sense because it lacks a theory of forces [1] and misinterprets essence because it lacks a theory of the will to power [2] are coming from. They amount to the claim that dialectics, Hegel's dialectics, lacks a theory of the unconscious, which is undoubtably true. It is not so evident, however, in the case of Adorno's negative dialectics because Adorno, in his collaborative with Horkheimer work *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* takes up Nietzsche's theory of will to power and turns it into a critique of the entwinement of power and rationality,[95] and, what is more, he waves the thread of the unconscious or half-conscious drive to self-preservation[96] with domination over nature and other men, and, as we learn from Bobka and Braunstein, the book *Negative Dialectics* was "the realization of a plan that he [Adorno, NK] and Horkheimer had pursued since the late 1940s: they planned a second volume of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, to continue the project of a dialectical logic" finally delivered with *Negative Dialectics*.[97]

A step further, Deleuze's critique implies that a theory of forces and a theory of will to power are sufficient to give content to all things, which means that, like Nietzsche, it considers that the psychological content

95 Habermas stresses the influence of Nietzsche in this book by Adorno and Horkheimer. He says that Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* "was the great model" of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and this book "owes more to Nietzsche than just the strategy of totalizing critique" (see Habermas, "The Entwinement", 22-23 and 28-29).

96 The affinity between self-preservation and will to power is given by Nietzsche himself: "Physiologists should think again before postulating the drive to self-preservation as the cardinal drive in an organic being. A living thing desires above all to *vent* its strength – life as such is will to power – : self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of it" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* 44).

97 Nico Bobka, and Dirk Braunstein, "Theodor W. Adorno and Negative dialectics", in *The SAGE Handbook of the Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, ed. Beverly Best, Werner Bonefeld, Chris O'Kane, (SAGE, 2018), 186.

of things is all there is to them. This is evident in *Anti-Oedipus*, where the startling claim is made that from the point of view of desire, there is only one class, the bourgeoisie, and this is all there is to it.[98] His other claim that there is only "desire and the social"[99] is implemented in a way that the social is all but annihilated under the pressure of desire since the liberation of desire is considered a necessary and sufficient condition for social liberation: "no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised."[100] On the contrary, Adorno is acutely sensitive to the social content of categories, as in his negative dialectical perspective, the nonidentical, non-conceptual, objective element is their constitutive element. As Bonefeld observes, for Adorno, the "truth content" of philosophical categories is the social experiences, the human practice, locked within them.[101] However, we saw in the previous section how Adorno's thought commits in reverse the same mistake as Deleuze when he fails to incorporate in his perspective the psychological content of Nietzsche's affirmation of life, highlighted by Nietzsche's thought and recognized by Deleuze. This fact is the consequence of the non-acknowledgment of the affirmative moment in Adorno's nonidentity thesis. The point we are making is that the above-mentioned critiques of dialectics [1] and [2] are themselves as partial and inadequate as the position they criticize: We have to be able to combine psychology and social theory to reach a satisfactory level of adequacy in our explanations and the proposed modification in Adorno's nonidentity thesis allows precisely such a combination.

Point [3] of the Deleuzean critique, that dialectics jumps from subject to predicate and from predicate back to subject without ever determining what each of them is, is a fair charge which is, however, leveled from

98 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London-New York: Continuum, 2004), 275.

99 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 31.

100 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 126-127.

101 Bonefeld, "Emancipatory Praxis", 139.

within negative dialectical positions too, against certain uses of dialectic; as, again, the Adornean Marxist Werner Bonefeld observes:

> Dialectics is not a formal procedure or method applied to reality to determine the enduring structures of economic necessity in the anatomy of bourgeois social relations. The much-praised dialectics between structure and agency is not helpful. It moves in vicious circles as it hops from structure to agency and back again from agency to structure; and instead of comprehending what they are, each is presupposed in a tautological movement of thought; neither is explained.[102]

Regarding the criticism that dialectics starts from the negation of the other instead of the affirmation of its own difference [5], we have already noted that Adorno's negative dialectics starts with a negation of itself reaching out for its otherness [5.a]. We then argued that the absence of affirmation, of affirmation of the value of "life as a phenomenon," to be more precise, is an important shortcoming in Adorno's thought, which, however, can be amended by the incorporation of the affirmative moment at the heart of nonidentity thesis. Instead of taking this step, Adorno offers an explanation of why nonidentity is experienced as negativity in a striking passage directly linked to the extreme individualism of Nietzsche's Zarathustra:

> Ideology lies in wait for the mind which delights in itself like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, for the mind which all but irresistibly becomes an absolute in itself. …In the unreconciled condition [between subject and object, NK], nonidentity is experienced as negativity. From the negative, the subject withdraws to itself, and to the abundance of its ways to react. Critical self-reflection alone will keep it from a constriction of this abundance, from building walls between itself and the object, from the supposition that its being-for-itself is an in-and-for-itself. The less identity can be assumed between subject and object, the more contradictory are the demands made upon the cognitive subject, upon its unfettered strength and candid self-reflection.[103]

102 Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: on Subversion and Negative Reason*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 68.

103 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 30-31.

In a way, Adorno here is returning the charge of negativity and reactiveness against dialectics back to Nietzsche (and Deleuze, for that matter): the radicalization of individualism in Zarathustra is itself a reaction of the split between subject and object, and Deleuze's stress on "difference" amounts to "building walls between subject and object" [5.b].

A further defense to the charge against dialectics as being the ideology of ressentiment allegedly starting from the negation of the other instead of from the affirmation of its own difference, as in the moral formulation of the slave, "You are evil, therefore I am good" instead of the noble, active, and affirmative "I am good, therefore you are bad,"[104] can be afforded by the following passage:

> Even the theory of alienation, the ferment of dialectics, confuses the need to approach the heteronomous and thus irrational world – to be "at home everywhere" as Novalis put it – with the archaic barbarism that the longing subject cannot love what is alien and different, with the craving for incorporation and persecution. If the alien were no longer ostracized, there hardly would be any more alienation.[105]

We take this to mean that the question is not to be able to say "I am good, therefore you are bad" as Deleuze's Nietzsche has it (the "archaic barbarism"), but to become able to say "I am good, therefore you are/can be good too." And this seems to us to be a stronger version of respect and preservation of difference (the "alien" that is "no longer ostracized") than the Deleuze/Nietzsche one in this instance [5.c]. However, the conclusive solution to the problem of affirmation and negation is, we argue, the elaboration of a *consistent* nonidentity concept of life, lacking in both Deleuze/Nietzsche *and* Adorno.

Regarding criticism [6], that in dialectics, "the abstract thought of contradiction… prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of aggression," we saw that ressentiment is not inherent to negation, negation is

104 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 119-122.

105 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 172.

not necessarily subject to ressentiment, and Deleuze himself uses negation as a necessary precondition and aftermath of affirmation, and all the discussion of the section on the "Nonidentity concept of life" regarding affirmation is relevant to this criticism too.

Finally, regarding criticism [4] that dialectics constantly poses a negation and then a negation of the negation or a synthesis, Deleuze is right that in Hegel, there is "negation of negation" as a positive [4.a], affirmative deed of dialectics, but Adorno goes much further than Deleuze in his critique of Hegel on this point: He notes that such affirmation is the "quintessence of identification… which *more arithmetico*, takes minus times minus for a plus,"[106] a step absent in Deleuze's argument [4.b], and concludes that Hegel's "system would unquestionably fall without the principle that to negate negation is positive"[107] [4.c]. Adorno also agrees with Deleuze that Hegel's dialectics aims at syntheses [4.d] but notes that this is not of the essence of dialectics: "The task of dialectical cognition is not, as its adversaries like to charge, to construe contradictions from above and to progress by resolving them – although Hegel's logic, now and then, proceeds in this fashion."[108] Adorno's own solution is to keep the contradiction in suspension without resolution. The negativity of his thought is in line with Nietzsche's dialectical view of truth, which demands the thought of "free spirits" to "take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty" and to be "practiced in maintaining [itself, NK] on insubstantial ropes and possibilities"[109] when, at the same time, in a dialectical move much like Adorno's own, it retains the longing for such certainty:[110] Nietzsche's critical thinking marks the limits of Hegel's influence in Adorno's negative dialectics [4.e].[111]

106 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158.

107 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 160.

108 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 153.

109 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (Vintage, 1974), 289-290.

110 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, (Penguin, 2004), 265.

111 We have shown in our doctoral thesis that Nietzsche can be viewed as an inconsistent nonidentity, dialectical in the Adornean sense thinker. See Nektarios Kastrinakis, "Deleuze's and Adorno's Nietzsche: Nietzsche as the Philosopher of the Unconscious

Conclusion

Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics yields an important modification in Adorno's nonidentity thesis when it comes to the matter of the affirmation of life. A consistent nonidentity conception of life cannot be pure negation but encloses an affirmative moment: It affirms that "life as a phenomenon" has a value but simultaneously negates the particular sociohistorical manifestation of this value as false. In this way, it becomes able to counter the Deleuzean critique without abandoning its own negative dialectical ground. Equipped with this modification, Adorno's negative dialectics shows that Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics concerning the lack of a theory of forces [point 1] and the lack of a theory of will to power [point 2], in its psychological one-sidedness, is as inadequate as the position it criticizes; the critique concerning the alleged negativity and resulting ressentiment of dialectical negation [point 6] is similar to the position it criticizes since Nietzsche's Overman in Deleuze's conception cannot escape negation, and since we also showed that the accusations exchanged between Deleuze and Adorno on this ground are equally half-justified: dialectical negation can potentially but *not necessarily* entail ressentiment, and affirmation can potentially but *not necessarily* entail compliance with the status quo. Further, negative dialectics incorporates Deleuze's critique that some versions of dialectics hop from subject to predicate and vice versa without ever determining what the object is [points 3]; that in Hegel's dialectics, negation of negation ends up in positivity [point 4.a] and that Hegel's dialectics would fall without it [point 4.c]. Adorno's negative dialectics also repels Deleuze's critique since we saw that it starts from a negation of itself rather than from a negation of the 'other' [point 5.a] and that Adorno returns the charge of reactiveness back to Nietzsche and Deleuze [point 5.b]; What is more, Adorno's critique of dialectics also supersedes Deleuze's when he charges that

and as Inconsistent Nonidentity, Dialectical Thinker", Department of Politics, University of York, UK, 2022. Available at: https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/31475/

negation of negation is the "quintessence of identification" [points 4.b], and provides a stronger protection of difference with its demand that the "alien is no longer ostracized" than Deleuze and Nietzsche's "archaic barbarism" or "I am good, therefore you are bad" [point 5.c,]. Adorno's critique of dialectics can even appear more Nietzschean than Deleuze's own in that it does not abandon conceptual thinking but retains conceptual contradictions and contradictions between concepts and objects in suspension (without a Hegelian resolution) in a Nietzschean fashion [point 4.e]. We can then say that Adorno's negative dialectics provides a comprehensive challenge to Deleuze's critique of dialectics, and that it can profit from this critique and gain in consistency if it incorporates an affirmative moment, the need for which is brought to light under the pressure of Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of dialectics.

In the course of the above argument, we also indicated in a rudimentary fashion that the recognition of the affirmative moment at the heart of the nonidentity thesis, unacknowledged by Adorno himself, has the potential of addressing one of the most severe and persistent critiques leveled against his thought, namely, it's extreme negativity. Adorno's thought seems to us, instead of bringing Critical Theory to a dead end and political inertia, to open up a horizon for the radical transformation of society (contrary to Buck-Morss and Thompson), as our analysis of the concept of freedom indicates (note 75), providing ways of judging between different conceptions of freedom and equality (contrary to Held), extracted out of the contradictions themselves and being concrete enough to be a guide for political action. It also becomes compatible with the affirmation of plenty of positive knowledge (contrary to Osborne) in the form of affirmation of identity thinking as of the intelligible forms of the objects (the starting point of negative dialectics) and of affirmation of a healthy self-esteem.

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We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

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