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From Negative Dialectics to Critical Metaphysics: Adorno, Hegel and Marx on the Structure of Critical Reason

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Abstract: My thesis here is two-fold. First, that Adorno's critique of conceptual rationality (in its Hegelian form) misconstrues its critical potential and forces a lapse into epistemic and ethical solipsism. Second, that a reconsideration of Hegel's doctrine of the concept as an ontological category can help us utilize negative thinking in a more compelling and politically relevant way. Adorno's project for a negative dialectics leads us not toward a critical form of reason with political (and hence, transformative) potential, but, rather, toward a retreat from the actual mechanisms that prop up defective forms of social reality. In addition, in his radical skepticism of the doctrine of the concept, Adorno also misses the chance to develop a critical theory of the good and a kind of critical practical reason that has the power to re-shape our sociality and social reality.

I

The problem of the reification of consciousness was at the heart of the enterprise of critical theory from its inception. The rationalization thesis diagnosed by Weber, commodity fetishism by Marx, and the inertia of class consciousness addressed by Lukács were all central fonts for the project of Frankfurt School theorists. Adorno's later philosophical project of articulating a "negative dialectics" was an extension of this broader diagnosis of modernity. His project was to formulate a kind of critical reason capable of withstanding the pressure of reification on consciousness, and it was his distinctive contribution to critical philosophy to emphasize the logic of dialectics as well as the centrality of immanent critique. But the full thrust of his project has had a deleterious impact

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on the ways that critical philosophy can provide for us a framework for praxis, for progressive social transformation. Indeed, although Adorno's negative subjectivity pierces into the materiality of the objective world and is able to pry open the defective sociality that lies beneath the fetishized forms of perception and consciousness characteristic of the reified lifeworld, it remains rooted in the subject, circumscribed by individual cognition. I think Adorno's negativism pushes us into a position where radical-aesthetic subjectivity becomes the only refuge for reason in the age of the administered world. If this is the case, then our only option is practical inertia and ethical solipsism.

I do not find this to be a satisfactory program for critical theory and will seek here to illuminate an alternate path to fashion a more politically viable form of immanent critique and critical ethics. More centrally, I want to suggest that a more compelling theory of critical reason and immanent critique can emerge once the limits of Adorno's negativism give way to a critical social ontology: to a critical metaphysics of our sociality that can be used to provide a foundation for critical judgment. Despite the importance of Adorno's thesis of non-identity with the fetishized forms of the phenomenal world, his project cannot grasp the kind of critical conceptual reason needed to supply us with the philosophical weaponry requisite for praxis-oriented social critique. Indeed, as J. M. Bernstein has noted concerning this problem in Adorno's thought: "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly because in order to live one would have to be able to know what to do."[2] I think this aporia needs to be addressed dialectically in order for Adorno's ideas about negativism to prove useful for the development of a more comprehensive form of critical rationality and agency. It is not a rejection of Adorno's negativism that interests me, but a dialectical exploration of its limits in order to sublate it within a higher structure of critical reason embodied by a critical social ontology.

My thesis here is two-fold. First, that Adorno's critique of conceptual rationality (in its Hegelian form) misconstrues its critical potential

2 J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.

and forces a lapse into epistemic and ethical solipsism. Second, that a reconsideration of Hegel's doctrine of the concept as an *ontological* category can help us utilize negative thinking in a more compelling and politically relevant way. Adorno's project for a negative dialectics leads us not toward a critical form of reason with political (and hence, transformative) potential, but, rather, toward a retreat from the actual mechanisms that prop up defective forms of social reality. In addition, in his radical skepticism of the doctrine of the concept, Adorno also misses the chance to develop a critical theory of the good and a kind of critical practical reason that has the power to re-shape our sociality and social reality. Indeed, because he views the doctrine of the concept abstractly, he disables critical reason from achieving the necessary immanent vantage point for transformative critique. Adorno mistakenly believes that the moment of immanent critique is always present once we refuse to allow the concept from coercing our forms of cognition about the object – when particularity resists the universal and the concept. But to do this actually diminishes social criticism and evades the problem of reconstituting a free, rational form of ethical life that can displace the administered world.

Instead of the non-conceptual form of thinking Adorno places at the center of his negative dialectics, I want to show how this project of constructing a negative dialectic fails to provide us with a dialectical form of thinking that can actually be critical. The moment of the positive in the dialectic cannot be suppressed (as Adorno argues is necessary) without doing violence to the possibility of a dialectic that is not merely in the mind, but is capable of realizing itself in reality. A genuinely critical dialectic requires negation be fused with a more expansive, richer form of rationality that expresses the full power of Hegelian and Marxian ideas in critical theory, specifically the Marxian dictum to transform the world as opposed to merely resisting it cognitively (essentially another form of contemplation).

To do this, I want to suggest that Adorno's project of a negative dialectics be dropped and that we instead pursue a critical social ontology

capable of providing a richer and more politically potent form of immanent critique, specifically one that will be able to dialectically fuse critical reflection with transformative praxis. Adorno's negative dialectic does not provide us with a philosophically robust means of critique: it merely reproduces in philosophy a kind of rationalized defense mechanism for a contemplative rather than praxis-oriented position. As Hans-Jürgen Krahl insightfully pointed out at the time, "the inability of Adorno's theory to deal with the question of organization pointed at objective shortcomings of this theory regarding the epistemologically and sociologically central category of social praxis."[3]

Adorno's conception of negative dialectics possesses a Kantian and subjectivist bias where the subject's powers of critical cognition are circumscribed by subjective reflection. It descends into a contemplative position, surrendering praxis to inert "critical" reflection. As Hauke Brunkhorst points out: "Adorno's step away from Hegel's *speculative* understanding of dialectics is a step back to Kant; just a step, not a return to some sort of neo-Kantianism."[4] Adorno is convinced that reification has penetrated so deeply into the structures of administrative-capitalist society that the culture and the framework for modern forms of agency have become unable to serve as resources for social transformation. As he points out in his essay "Education after Auschwitz,": "Since the possibility of changing the objective – namely societal and political – conditions is extremely limited today, attempts to work against the repetition of Auschwitz are necessarily restricted to the subjective dimension."[5] I

3 Hans-Jürgen Krahl, "The Political Contradictions in Adorno's Critical Theory." In Judith Marcus and Zoltan Tar (eds.) *Foundations of the Frankfurt School of Social Research*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984): 307-310, 308.

4 Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 23. Nigel Gibson goes one step further, arguing that: "Adorno reads Hegel's Absolute as a neo-Kantian, that is to say, he 'falls back' on viewing the Absolute as a reflection of the antinomy of bourgeois society. In doing so Adorno . . . views Hegel's dialectic as a reconciliation with reality rather than, as in Marx's conception, dialectic as motioning to a transcendence of reality." "Rethinking an Old Saw: Dialectical Negativity, Utopia, and *Negative Dialectic* in Adorno's Hegelian Marxism." In Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (eds.) *Adorno: A Critical Reader*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 260.

5 T.W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz." In *Critical Models*. Trans. Henry W. Pick-

think Adorno's position runs the risk of falling into a solipsistic, even inert form of negative thinking and a fetishization of theory over that of praxis. This no doubt explains his academic celebration in an era still deeply scarred by postmodernism and the cleavage between theory and praxis that marks the neoliberal era.

I think this indicates a real problem for Adorno's transformation of critique since it provides us with a path to a contemplative rather than praxis-oriented critical theory. In short, I want to suggest that Adorno's philosophical project can be made salient only if it is in fact merged with what he opposed: to a kind of practical-ontological dialectic that thinkers like Marx and Lukács espoused. In what follows, I will show how Adorno's non-conceptual negative dialectic has the potential to lead us to ethical solipsism (II) before demonstrating how Hegel's doctrine of the concept is to be read as a critical metaphysics rather than a purely cognitive procedure (III) which can then be used to fuse to Adorno's negativist doctrine to provide us with a critical social ontology that can both break down the reification of consciousness as well as point us toward a transformative form of social critique and critical judgment (IV).

II

For Adorno, consciousness is reified once the system of the administered world has been able to reflect itself in the consciousness of the subject. This occurs once the categories of the administered world also become the categories of consciousness. Adorno makes this clear in *Prisms* when he writes: "Absolute reification which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation."[6] What now becomes the central project for critical theory is the rejection of the "false totality" that is increasingly consuming the subject and its powers of resistance underlining the "radical evil" nature of the "total society."

ford. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191-204, 192.

6 T.W. Adorno, *Prismen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 30.

Adorno outlines a new role for dialectics: one that will detach itself from Hegel's own thesis that it be linked with the concept, with system and totality. The relation between subject and object must be recast as one where the subject's cognition resists being absorbed through its reconciliation with the object. The concept links subject and object, and it is only though undermining this triadic relation via negation and the non-conceptual that such a resistance will be possible in the totally administered society. For Hegel, dialectical thinking was supposed to end up with the "negation of the negation," that is, with the realization on behalf of consciousness that what was true, what was rational, was system, *process*. This was the speculative dimension of the concept where thought would be able to participate in the rational structure that was constitutive of reality. But Adorno's thesis is that the social totality, the totality of the administered world, is a false truth that poses as truth, generating its own categories of self-justification. Reification is the result, infecting not only the everyday lifeworld of subjects but also philosophy itself. In fact, philosophy – as it has come down to us at least – is unable to take into consideration this false totality; it even has the tendency to give itself over to this false totality: "Philosophy retains so much respect for systems that even that which confronts it does so as a system. The administered world moves in this way. System is negative objectivity, not the positive subject."[7]

Rather than allow cognition to move to its speculative phase, *pace* Hegel, and thereby become folded into the false universal of the instrumentalized world, thought must remain suspended in the negative and resist the temptation toward any reconciliation with reality or the identity of the concept with the object. To think in terms of negation entails that we resist the totalizing forces that the administered, instrumentally rational world impinges on us and our thinking. Philosophy is not immune to such forces: "In its inalienably general elements all philosophy carries, even that which intends freedom, the unfreedom in which society sus-

7 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik.* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 29.

tains itself."[8] Again, it is important to keep in mind that Adorno's thesis is just as much sociological as it is philosophical: he is arguing that, as Lukács had before him, the conceptual schemes that we use are themselves produced by the social system itself. Hence, Adorno urges, at the beginning of his *Negative Dialectics*, for us to see through the falseness of the social reality present to us: "The power of the existing reality erects façades off of which consciousness bounces. It must strive to beat its way through them."[9] The fear here is one of "concretism," or that form of consciousness that has been rendered unable to think in terms of abstraction and merely "cling to what is closest."[10]

Negativity seeks to undermine this; it allows the subject to hold at bay and resist the onslaught of immediacy that transforms critical reason into reified reflection. Adorno proposes that negative dialectics will allow us to free concepts from the reified manifold of the administered totality. What is required is a confrontation with the object-domain that can grant us some experience of that domain that is not already determined by the prevailing conceptual schemes generated by the defective social totality. This is the non-conceptual: that form of reality that is left out of the reified conceptual manifold that hides the social content from conceptual view. We can overcome the totality of reification only by asking how the relation between particular and universal do not fit together, how neither does justice to the other. Non-identity if crucial because only in that moment of contradiction can thought be brought to think what has been repressed by the reified system of concepts. The key here is the idea of *contradiction*: to show how the world that is presented to us contradicts itself or the concept that is assigned to it; it concerns how the systems fail to fulfill the concepts to which they are fused. To resist identity-thinking is therefore the key. As Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*: "The opposition of thought to what is heterogeneous reproduces itself in thought as

8 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 54.

9 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 27.

10 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 40 and *passim*.

its immanent contradiction. Reciprocal critique of universal and particular, identifying acts, judging them as to whether the concept does justice to what it deals with, and whether the particular fulfills its concept, are the media of thinking about the non-identity of particular and concept."[11]

In this sense, Adorno echoes a similar critique of Hegel to that of Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard, Hegel's dialectic was unable to do justice to the particular, specifically to the experience of the individual, to subjective experience. Hegel's dialectic was mistaken, Kierkegaard argued, because it sought a synthesis which particular experience could never provide, what Kierkegaard referred to as "a dialectic without synthesis." Instead, he argued that the contradictions generated by experience cannot be rationally resolved but instead must be chosen between; philosophy must give way to religion, reason to that of faith. Although it is clear this was not Adorno's solution, he does mirror a similar position to Kierkegaard: for Adorno sees aesthetic sensibility as the means by which subjectivity can resist the reified manifold of the totality.[12] Indeed, as Arnold Künzli points out: "Adorno's dialectics – a negation of negation that cannot lead to a position – would have to lead philosophically to nothingness; only a Kierkegaardian leap can promise salvation."[13]

In place of Kierkegaardian faith, Adorno imputes the aesthetic and aesthetic contemplation as the means by which agency turns inward, from external praxis to aesthetic-critical cognition, toward the power of the *particular* to keep the totalizing force of the administered world at bay and, at the same time, illuminate a *promesse de bonheur* for another

11 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 147.

12 Kai Hammermeister remarks that: "While Horkheimer tended more and more toward a nihilistic position that was only appeased slightly late in his life by a turn toward metaphysics, Adorno always relied on art as the last factor of resistance against a total society." *The German Aesthetic Tradition*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196. It is important, of course, to remember that Kierkegaard's aesthetic ideas push into the non-cognitive and there by lead more toward Nietzsche and Foucault then to Adorno. But the parallel of Adorno's philosophical skepticism and solipsism with Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjective experience is a robust one with implications I will explore more below.

13 Arnold Künzli, *Aufklärung und Dialektik*. (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1971), 134.

mode of life. Kierkegaard emphasizes faith, but Adorno social content. But whereas Kierkegaard emphasizes choice, Adorno's position remains solipsistic and apraxic. Subjectivity may be critical, but only in a contemplative sense – it fails to grasp the essential unity between thought and action that constitutes praxis. If the world is "radically evil," if reification subsumes the individual in a total process, then there is no way to reconcile it with reason. Philosophy must therefore be modeled on the aesthetic, as a form of cognition.[14] We must instead look to the particular and resist the dialectical motion toward universality, toward conceptual thought. In this sense, Adorno's return to subjectivity is a retreat from critical agency, a move toward solipsism and toward a cognitive, contemplative form of resistance. It opens up a dualism between thought and action, between subjectivity and agency that restricts its capacity to grasp the praxis-centered ontology of the social world.

But again, Adorno's negative dialectic is not simply resistance to the powers of reification, it goes further to emphasize the *non-conceptual*, the qualitative aspects of particular experience rather than the abstractness of the universal. Here we are asked to pass over from philosophy into an aesthetic sensibility. But here is where the problem emerges: the negative cannot be useful to us politically or in critical-practical affairs if it pushes thought into the realm of the *non-conceptual*. This is one place where we can see Adorno's skepticism of the dialectic move him toward a contemplative stance, toward *solipsism*: a fundamentally skeptical stance toward the objectivity of reason in the world and the view that one's own subjective (negative) thinking is all that can be relied upon to resist the reified administered world. It reflects more a kind of social powerlessness in

14 Again, Hammermeister is correct, I think, when he argues: "[I]n art, Adorno locates the potential formerly attributed to philosophy both to show reality as it is and to remind us of a better reality. At the very basis of art we therefore find two interconnected functions: the presentation of reality in all its shortcomings and its critique of with a better society in mind." *German Aesthetic Tradition*, 197. Also cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 341ff. The problem here is the indeterminacy of this alternative, "better" reality. The move toward aesthetics also obscures the kind of critical practical reason requisite for actual social transformation, i.e., a move from critical solipsism to objective social change via the transformation of the relations, norms and practices that generate social reality.

the face of the alienated world than one with transformative potential.[15] Breaking out of this solipsism would require an approach to conceptuality that emphasizes its ontological dimensions; one that asks us to view de-reification as more than a cognitive procedure, more than a "thinking (*denkende*) confrontation of object and thing,"[16] but one of active socio-praxiological change and transformation.

Some have defended Adorno's position as inherently practical. Werner Bonefeld, for instance, argues that: "Adorno's concept of the concept is emphatically practical. It holds that however much the forms of human practice have autonomised themselves from the individual, they remain forms of human practice."[17] But this is still an essentially *cognitive* stance. Praxis is not simply an object for contemplation; it is, as Aristotle stated, activity with and for a purpose.[18] Hence, we can judge practices on the basis of what ends and purposes that orient and define them. Adorno's negative dialectics opens up a dualism between thought and action; praxis, the unification of thought, action and being, requires that we understand that critical praxis is one where the ontological contradictions that exist in society are overcome via immanent critique which opens up for us the rational, i.e., self-determining forms of praxis and social relations that concretize freedom. Immanent critique now must have not only negation in view, but an alternative scheme of sociality in view

15 As Richard Lichtman insightfully notes about the subjective experience of capitalist social relations: "Because 'individualism' is constructed out of social powerlessness rather than autonomy, attempts at individual remedy are unable to reach their proposed ends." *The Production of Desire: The Integration of Psychoanalysis into Marxist Theory*. (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 225. Although it would be wrong to maintain that Adorno's was a simplistic form of bourgeois individualism, there is nevertheless a sense of social powerlessness that defines his ideas about negative and aesthetic consciousness that qualify it as a kind of "critical solipsism."

16 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 146.

17 Werner Bonefeld, "Emancipatory Praxis and Conceptuality in Adorno." In John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros and Sergio Tischler (eds.) *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*. (London: Pluto Press, 2009): 122-147, 142.

18 Aristotle notes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that: "thought (διάνοια) alone moves nothing, but thought directed toward an end (πρακτική) does; for this is indeed the moving cause of productive activity (του ποιεῖ) also since he who makes something always has some further end (τέλος) in view." *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a-35.

as well; it must be able to grasp that self-determination is a systematic, social reality and not merely a cognitive or reflective stance.

In this sense, Adorno's negativity is necessary but insufficient for a critical theory of society with public aims. Although negativity draws attention toward the repressed social content and away from reified categories, it does not point us toward the positing of the new, toward a genuinely rational content that can explode and displace defective reality. Critical praxis requires not only a new mode of thought, but a new conception of the relation, processes, institutions, as well as ends and purposes toward which the good society should be oriented. It requires that we move from negative cognition to a *critical ontology of social reality*. It is not an open-ended theory of practice that we require but a concrete understanding of the ways that free sociality can be shaped and structured, what social ends and purposes are to be held to be legitimate and rational, and so on.

What I think Adorno misses is that Hegel's doctrine of the concept leads us toward a concept of freedom that provides for us principles grounded in the metaphysics of free sociality; that the negative implies the alternative, rational form of social relatedness and processes that must supplant the ontic world of the merely existent. The negative must therefore be more than a subjective-epistemic process, it must lead to a form of immanent critique with insight into the social-ontological mechanisms responsible for creating and sustaining the social world. The collapse into solipsism is a necessary result of a kind of critical reflection that eschews the full implications of the Hegelian doctrine of the concept. In order to jar subjectivity from solipsism and into critical judgment and action, there must be some grasp of what features and logics rational forms of life possess. This becomes the project for a critical theory of judgment rooted in Hegelian-Marxist thinking. Philosophy must be *realized*. But Adorno is convinced that praxis is now a dead end. As Künzli points out: "negative dialectics has from the beginning superimposed a taboo on praxis . . . it is presupposed that praxis today is impossible."[19]

19 Künzli, *Aufklärung und Dialektik*, 139.

What is universal, in Hegel's sense, in this position is the idea that praxis is a phylogenetic feature of being human, of being a generative being. Being a human being means, conceptually, being a practical and relational being; the concept of human essence here takes on critical power once we see that it is has the capacity to at once explode forms of reification and the ideology of exchange value, but also provide the generative context for a new form of ethical life, a new form of existence. By emphasizing the particular, we do no get out of the dilemma of reification; we merely produce a refuge from political life, from the possibility of counter-posing an alternative form of reality that can displace the totalizing system. The negative dialectic therefore provides us with a path toward the postmodern abandonment of universalism and common goods and fragments reflection on the inverted world. The system of the commodity form remains total even as the self-consciousness of the members of this society are shattered and reflect the irrational particular.

It seems to me that Adorno's reading of Hegel's logic of the concept is informed by a positivist strain: i.e., that Hegel's notion of the concept represses unique and distinctive aspects of the object in favor of universalizability; it emphasizes the *quantum* of the object over its *qualia*. Instead, Hegel's logic of the concept takes on critical significance and potency once we see it in social-ontological terms: it is through the gradual phenomenological process of recognition that the concept becomes realized: i.e., the concept of our relational-processual essence as a species that, once grasped by rational agents, becomes the explosive power capable of undermining the ontic forms of empirical existence that is little more than the encrusted, reified forms of life rooted in dominance, exchange and exploitation. Non-identity now reveals its radical impulse: the resistance to the reified forms of thought that cloak the exploitation and suffering that lies beneath the stable, innocuous field we experience. Non-identity means a non-identification of the given object with its socially-assigned concept; with a resistance to the given conceptual schemes that blanket

the world and reconcile us to the system of production and exchange that pulses beneath it.

The negative dialectic is therefore one means by which a critical form of subjectivity can be maintained – but this kind of subjectivity remains precisely that: *subjective*. There is no way to pass into the concrete, into the "positive," into the actual ontological realm of the social. Praxis is sealed off and, with it, the possibility for self- and social transformation. The danger, Adorno believes, is that the totalizing forces of modernity would absorb and control the individual; that reification would become total and suppress any capacity for emancipation. But he maintains that a critical subjectivity can be shaped that is oriented against this administered world. In his aesthetic theory, Adorno employs the concept of the "force-field" (*Kraftfeld*) in order to express this idea where the formalism of the quantified *ratio* is resisted from absorbing consciousness and its experience of the object domain. In critical cognition, by following the negative dialectic, one would be able to critique and resist the tendency of being reconciled to the formal rationality of the administered world.[20] But Adorno also argues that aesthetic experience is one place where the relation of the concept, of the universal to the particular, that is to be staved off in negative dialectical thinking, can be maintained:

> If anywhere Hegel's theory of the movement of the concept is correct, it is in aesthetics; it has to do with the reciprocal relation of universal and particular, which does not impute the universal to the particular externally but seeks it in the force fields (*Kraftzentren*) of the particular itself.[21]

The aesthetic now overcomes the philosophical, the conceptual is subsumed by the experience of the particular. The particular now becomes one way to deconstruct the reified schemes of concepts. The particular resists being absorbed by the universal, the concept. It holds out for us the point where the conceptual scheme of the reified world breaks down

20 Zoltan Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and T.W.* Adorno. (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 153ff.

21 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 521.

in its attempt to rationalize it. The particular is the moment where philosophical non-identity and the aesthetic force field meet.

Now the concern becomes a resistance to the concept as such. The move toward the non-conceptual pushes us into the realm of the aesthetic and out of the realm of critical reason. Subjectivity is indeed highlighted once again, but at the expense of an immanent form of critical reason that can inform *practical* concerns. Now, it is subjective experience, the "ineffable," that is prized over the socio-practical domain as the object of critical reflection and consciousness. I think it cannot be sufficient for a critical conception of reason to take a wholly subjective form. The problem here is that a negative dialectic that clings to non-conceptuality grants us no insight into a mode of transformation; there exists only the state of negation and the reflective knowledge of that state of negation.[22]

The result is that Adorno's critical subject separates itself from "society" as an object that can be transformed; it no longer sees anything immanent to our sociality or the shapes of our practices that can be used as a wedge not only to critique and undermine the existent reality, this resulting solipsistic stance disables the subject from forming a critical-practical reason that will be able to build new, more rational, more freedom-enhancing forms of sociality as well. I think this stems from a fundamental mistake Adorno makes about Hegel's doctrine of the concept: specifically that it is an *ontological* category and not merely an *epistemic* one. Adorno seems to elide the Hegelian theory of the concept with the positivist take on knowledge. As he notes in his lectures on negative dialectics: "For in general the concept tends to magnify its objects; it perceives in them only what is large enough to compare with other objects. Whatever falls through the net is inevitably the most minute thing, but it may well contain the very thing that cries out for philosophical explanation."[23]

22 As James Gordon Finlayson has argued: "When one self-consciously reflects on it, only the state of knowledge itself comes into view. What this means is that the good that a state of ineffable knowledge delivers is nothing but the good of being in that state." "Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable." *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2002): 1-25, 17.

23 T. W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics.* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 70.

Adorno's central claim here is that the concept essentially does violence to the object by fitting it into some *a priori* abstract ideal through purging it of its particularity and qualitative features. Emphasis on the negative in dialectical thinking will, for Adorno, force us to consider what has been left out of the conformity of thought. "Dialectics," he says "represents the attempt to incorporate into philosophy whatever is heterogeneous, philosophy's other, we might call it. To anticipate, we might say it wishes to import the non-conceptual into philosophy."[24] Of course, as a critique of positivism this makes sense; but for Hegel, the concept is syllogistically constructed, it is not an ideal of some empirically given object to which it is submitted and to which the object must conform. Adorno does not consider how Hegel's logical doctrine of the concept can in fact resist what he sees as fatal: namely the ways that the reciprocal mediation of particular, universal and individual within the structure of the concept can help explode the constricting forces of reification.

Again, it is worth emphasizing that, for Adorno, philosophy must seek out what is non-conceptual precisely because of his fear that what is posited by Hegelian dialectic will lead to a coercion by what is posited at the expense of that which is repressed. As he says:

> [W]e must ask this question: is this objectivity which we have shown him to be a necessary condition and which subsumes abstract subjectivity in fact the higher factor? Does it not rather remain precisely what Hegel reproach it with being in his youth, namely your externality, the course of collective? Does not the retreat to this supposedly higher authority signify the regression of the subject, which had earlier one its freedom only with great efforts, with infinite pains? This mechanism of coercion binds subjectivity and thought into the objectivity that stands opposed to it.[25]

But this gets something very crucial wrong in Hegel's account of reason and the relation between subject and object. Hegel's metaphysical conception of reason is one that sees the index of rationality not as what is

24 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 57.

25 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 16.

posited nor that which is noumenally "essential." Rather, it follows the thesis that concepts are structures of being as well as structures of consciousness. The main issue here is that reason is seen to possess a metaphysical structure: the concept of human society, for instance, is one that possesses a structure that can either be fully realized or defective and pathological. The key is to tease out what these logical or metaphysical properties are and see how they can serve as a basis for immanent and transformative critique.

Seen in this way, the dialectical logic of reason grips both subject and object. The concept is structured by the syllogistic structure that mediates particularity, individuality and universality. As opposed to the positivist conception of reason that coerces the particular object into its abstract universal, Hegel's doctrine seeks a richer grip of reality by showing how there can be various instantiations of a concept. To say that the family, for instance, realizes its concept is simply to say that it is an instantiation of freedom; that the members of that socio-relational structure exist within a system of relations and norms that realize freedom. This further means that the members of that family have as their collective purpose the actuality of their freedom as non-dependence. A family is irrational and defective when it is structured for some alternative purpose: say for the father's benefit at the expense of his wife and children, or somet other kind of defective scheme. The key here is that reason becomes realized in terms of the concept – te concept is itself the most rational (i.e., freedom-enhancing) form of life that any particular socio-relational scheme can realize. This is why Hegel's central dictum – as with all of German Idealism – is the thesis that self-consciousness, rationality and freedom are a single, unified structure. To be self-conscious of oneself as a socio-practical being means to be self conscious of the conceptual manifod that underwrites free forms of life. This can only be accomplished concretely: through the actualization of reason. Freedom and reason become *ontological* and cease to be epistemic.

The moment of solipsism now can be glimpsed in this effort to assert the primacy of the non-conceptual as the crucible for immanent critique.

Negativism forces us to adopt the stance that the world is radically evil and that reason has become absorbed into the instrumental mechanisms of the totally administered society.[26] As such, Adorno believes that negative thinking articulates a form of resistance in its own right: "If we start by thinking quite simply of the position of subjective consciousness, in other words, of the intellectual behavior of each one of us, we could say that such resistant thinking contains positivity in its resistance to the very elements I have attempted to explain to you with the concept of the reified consciousness."[27] But the limit here emerges when we see that the non-conceptual encourages a further flight from objectivity: in particular, it abandons a concept of the good as a component of rational freedom as a *concrete property of social reality*.

This critical strategy is ultimately self-defeating. The non-conceptual leads us to a neo-Fichtean moment where the alternative to transformative critique is one of mere subjective resistance. The collapse into solipsism means that it is unable to grasp the thesis that reification is not merely epistemic but more thickly understood as *ontological*: defective concepts shape norms, relations, institutions and social processes that articulate forms of being. The concept reaches into our systemic relations with others and serves as the basis for critical judgment. In this sense, negative dialectics, by reaching for the non-conceptual, cannot provide us with a critical grasp of the mechanisms of the defective social reality and, by extension, the means to transform them and concretize freedom. For Adorno, the conceptual is always cognitive, it is detached from the ontological.[28] Seen differently, the true power of reification can be under-

26 On this point, Fabian Freyenhagen has pointed out that: "radical evil is to be resisted because of its intrinsic badness, and to resist it *just is* to demonstrate autonomy, humility, and affection." "Adorno's Ethics without the Ineffable." *Telos*, no. 155 (2011): 127-149, 146. Also cf. Vasilis Grollios, *Negativity and Democracy: Marxism and the Critical Theory Tradition*. (London: Routledge, 2017), 168ff. However, this account still clings to a minimalist and, frankly, Kantian conception of ethics that ignores the more radical potential within the Hegel's thought and his metaphysical account of the good and reason.

27 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 25.

28 Nigel Gibson remarks along similar lines that: "as a total program, negative dialectics offers nothing in its place. That would be simply another ideology. The critique of ide-

stood as a corruption not only of consciousness, but also as a corruption of *praxis*.[29] It concerns the ability of social systems to constitute our own practices and norms, the very mechanisms that re-create and sustain defective and irrational social relations and institutions.

This means that reification is the product of those social forms that can only be sustained and reproduced as a result of the kinds of practical relations that they are able to anchor within the subject. Adorno's hope is that this act of each individual thinking negatively will create a new kind of positivity in the sense that the dominant reality will no longer have a hold over consciousness: "Its value is its right to resist such habits of thought, even if it does not 'have' a positivity of its own. For it is precisely this 'having something,' having it as something fixed, given and unquestioned on which one can comfortably rely – it is this that thought should actually resist."[30] Although this can be seen as a starting moment for critique, I want now to show that is sustained as a general theory of critique, it will disable the capacity for social transformation, the imperative to change the world and realize concrete freedom.

III

If Hegel's metaphysical understanding of reason is taken seriously, then the process of negation must be understood in ontological terms, not merely categorial, subjective terms. Hegel's is a critical conception of objective reason rather than a merely epistemic mode of reflection. Negation and immanent critique must be seen through the lens of a critical social ontology, one that grants us access to the mechanisms of social as well as self-transformation. What must be grasped by any critical theory of society is the various ways in which the predominant structure of

ology cannot provide a method to help liberate us from the capitalist reified reality we all inhabit. What Adorno is asserting, however, through all the clamor about identity is the logical impossibility of any theory about reality . . . . The resistance to conceptualization leaves us with a sum of particulars not identifiable with any other sum." "Rethinking an Old Saw," 265.

29 See the important discussion by Konstantinos Kavoulakos, *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis: From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 129ff.

30 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 25.

social relations that define any given social reality are themselves the result of generative mechanisms such as norms, values and practices that constitute the substance that needs to be accountable to rationality, to the conceptual structure of self-determining sociality. The essential substrate of our social-relatedness and the ensembles of practices that enact them require not simply negation, but a transformation. The question now becomes: what is the conceptual-ontological apparatus that defines self-determining sociality? Negation requires us to think in conceptual terms; it requires not only cognitive resistance, but new values and norms that can displace the predominant generative modes of thought and belief that articulate the defective world.

Now, in this respect, Adorno's starting point for re-tooling dialectics is correct, especially when he notes: "the negativity I am speaking about contains a pointer to what Hegel calls determinate negation. In other words, negativity of this kind is made concrete and goes beyond mere standpoint philosophy by confronting concepts with their objects and, conversely, objects with their concepts."[31] But this need not be taken to the extreme where the concept itself is called into question. Indeed, I will seek to show here that it is only through a proper grasp of Hegel's logical doctrine of the concept that negativity can be used to buttress a theory of immanent critique. The key idea must be kept in mind: that the overcoming of reification is not merely cognitive, but is *embedded in practices themselves*. This is because the status of the social world is a function of *human praxis*. That is to say, it is not only a cognitive constitution of the object that is at issue, but a *social-ontological constitution of the object domain* that requires our attention. Immanent critique takes on its most potent form when thought is able to grasp contradiction in terms of the chasm between ontic, phenomenal forms of social reality and their divergence from the rational forms of relations, institutions and ends. The core question here becomes what this rational form is and what criteria define and embody it. Adorno's limit here resides in his detachment of negation from the concept, a move whereby one may indeed rage against

31 Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 25.

the reified world, refuse to participate in it, resist it cognitively, but thereby evade a form of practical rationality oriented toward social transformation. As a result, critical theory takes a turn toward postmodernism and away from the Hegelian-Marxian structure of thought where reason must be understood as emergent in human phenomena via our practical relations. The standpoint of critique now becomes objective in the sense that the ontology of our social world achieves a normative status when we see the inner workings of the concept as an emergent property of the structure of our social relations and practices.

Hegel's thesis is that reason possesses a *metaphysical structure* by which he means it is a property not only of subjective cognition but also of the structure of the objective world as well. Reason is not simply a scheme of concepts employed to understand the world, nor is it what we agreed upon through intersubjective discursivity with recognized others. His position is that thought and being must share the same conceptual structure. It is the most important and distinctive aspects of his philosophical project to understand reason as more than a subjective capacity, but also something that undergirds reality itself. The aim is to achieve a harmony between the reasons we hold as concept-users and the rational structure of objective reality itself. As Hegel remarks in the Introduction to his *Encyclopedia Logic*: "it may be held the highest and final aim of philosophic science to bring about, through the ascertainment of this harmony, a reconciliation of self-conscious reason with the reason which is in the world – in other words, with actuality."[32]

Adorno's negativist doctrine is perhaps more Freudian then Hegelian in that the negative dialectic teases out what is *repressed* in order to gain an immanent critical vantage point.[33] But this runs into severe lim-

32 G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), §6.

33 With respect to his negative dialectics, Adorno's indebtedness to Freud is explicit when he says: "if you have a theory like Freud, and a well-formed theory of repression, you will be able to see in advance that such apparently lifeless, obscure objects may contain something of interest that has been pulled out of shape. And in fact, what the three principal themes of Freudian psychology have in common – involuntary actions or slips, dreams and the neuroses – is that they all combine an element of the non-conceptual or, as we would say nowadays, the absurd, the irrational, with a rele-

its when we consider that reification can disable the power of thinking negatively in this fashion without the metaphysical ballast that Hegel in particular sees rationality as possessing. But this itself must also take on a critical-metaphysical view of human sociality itself. Hegel's structure of the concept embraces the processes of mechanism, chemism and teleology which means that at its core is the generative power of freedom itself – that the core idea at the center of the concept is freedom. By this Hegel means that the concept realizes itself without force or according to the inner dynamic rather than guided form without. Now, here is where we can see that an ontological turn is fruitful for critical theory: for the logic of the concept is not premised on the absorption of the particular into the universal, but rather consists of a dialectical relation between particular, universal and individual.

The concept is also the basis of freedom itself because its fulfillment is also the realization that any thing exists within a systemic context of causes that are reciprocally structured, interdependent and oriented toward some end or *telos*. As Hegel puts it in the *Enzyklopädie*: "The concept is *freedom* as the power of the *self-realization of substance* (*für sie seiende substantielle Macht*), and is a totality in which *each* of the moments is a whole."[34] Now, what this metaphysical conception of reason entails is the capacity for self-consciousness to provide the basis for immanent critique. But it does this because it gives us an insight into what reason actually is: not a cogitative reflection on an object by a subject, but a metaphysical property of systemic processes with internal relations. It is not a formal conception of freedom, but an ontological one in that freedom is a metaphysical property of an object. Now, in terms of human sociality, this takes on a more complex register because this freedom is the product of our collective ways of shaping and organizing our self- and other-re-

vance, an essential importance *for the concept*. I think, then, that philosophy – and for that matter almost every material discipline – ought to follow Freud's truly brilliant example and concentrate on matters that have not been pre-digested by the pre-existing concepts of the prevailing philosophy and science." *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 69. It should be seen that this Freudian bias also skews Adorno's reading of Hegel.

34 Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, §160.

lations, institutions and so on – it is a product of *Geist*. This is because self-consciousness is only grasped when recognition has played itself out and a we-consciousness becomes the structure of self-consciousness. As such, the social world now opens up to us not as an aggregate of individuals, but the substance of ethical life: i.e., the substance being the socio-relational essence of human being itself, something resonant with the philosophical efforts of the young Marx as well.

The good is not a purely aesthetic category, it is an *ethical* one. As such, it is a concept in Hegel's sense: it is a manifestation in objective reality of specific features of reason. In terms of the social realization of the good, the concept plays a central role: not as an abstract, ideal type, but *as a concrete manifestation of social relations and purposes*. This is where Idealism and materialism (a true Hegelian-Marxism) becomes manifest. The concept of freedom emerges as a concrete, objective state of reality when it is able to emerge through the ontology of our sociality itself. This means, following the logic of the doctrine of the concept in Hegel's *Logic*, the movement from mechanism to chemism to teleology. This means that move from social relations where individuals are dependent on others, where their social world is alienated from them to one where they form interdependent relations with the common purpose of freedom for each as the criteria of social rationality. Truth is not only the whole, it is system; and any social system is rational and good when it promotes the freedom of its members within the context of socially interdependent relations.[35]

Capitalism violates this by articulating forms of dependence, exploitation, quantification and social ends (*telē*) that serve particular rather than universal ends. Reification now becomes an ontological category once we see that it is not only the epistemic inability of the subject to perceive reality outside of the dominant categories generated by the administered society, but also because the norms and practices that we instantiate are

35 Elsewhere I have elaborated this understanding of Hegel's theory of society and politics in my essay "The Metaphysical Infrastructure of Hegel's Practical Philosophy." In M. Thompson (ed.) *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 101-141.

themselves rooted in projects and ends that are not our own, not constitutive of a social reality that is rational and free. By this I mean that the nexus of relations we have with one another can take irrational forms such as domination or dependence or be oriented toward ends that are not beneficial for the totality of the members of the whole (profits from exploitation, pollution, arbitrary power, and so on). The concept is only fully realized when the whole is self-determining: i.e., when these shapes of our sociality are organized according to reciprocal interdependence for common ends. The negative of such a state implies the irrationality of the world and also the means for overcoming it.

In this respect, Hegel's social metaphysics seeks to understand the reality of our practical lives together not as constructed from a set of accepted, formal *a priori* principles nor of some natural pattern of development, but, rather, from the specific structures and ends that our lives together take, that we create and sustain. Society, the ethical life of the community, is rationally constructed when it has realized its concept: that is, when its features, its substance has moved from immediate unity through that of cause and effect and into the final stage of reciprocity.[36] The move from mechanism to chemism to teleology in Hegel's logical schema entails that reality becomes increasingly rational and free as these features develop and articulate themselves without coercion or external force – they are *self-determining*. Now, when we talk about ethical life, this is a unique kind of object or form of reality because it is itself made up of subjects, of concept-users. We come to understand ourselves as constitutive members of a rational and free community only when this stage of reciprocity has reached its *teleological purpose*: that of free personhood itself. Hence, the syllogistic form of the concept takes on an ontological form when one's *particularity* is mediated by the *universal* thereby fortifying *individuality*, a "universal self-consciousness."

36 See the discussion by Paul G. Cobben, "The Logical Structure of Self-Consciousness." In Alfred Denker and Michael Vater (eds.) *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: New Critical Essays*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity's Books 2003): 193-212.

This should not be construed as abstract Idealism. Hegel's thesis, one that undergirds Marx's critical theory as well, in that alienated particularity can only emancipate itself through a social-relational nexus that is defined by interdependence and common ends – the ultimate common end of our relations are the mutual development of free, self-determining individuality within the context of our essential sociality. The metaphysical thesis that undergirds Hegel's theory of social freedom is therefore that the substance of ethical life be understood as consisting of those norms, practices, relations and institutions that embody a free sociality; for Marx, it is one that requires this penetrate into the productive spheres of the individual and society as well. Indeed, only when the particular person is able to enter into reciprocal, interdependent relations with others are they able to achieve individuality as this particularity is mediated by the universal: by the nexus of interdependent relations that are constitutive of our sociality.

The concept now can be seen as critical once it is contrasted (negatively, to be sure) with the state of the ontic, of the reality principle that any agent finds him or herself in. The negative, when fused to the logic of the concept, now can be seen to break open the ontological potentiality of self-determining (as opposed to heteronomous, exploitive, dominating) forms of social reality. It is the conceptual that completes the project of critique; negativity needs the conceptual architecture of reason in order for the defective domain of the ontic to be undermined and for emancipation to be glimpsed. Critical consciousness can only live up to its name when it is able to see that this ontic state is negatively related to the potential reality or being of that the concept can supply. This can only come about through the transformation of relations, practices, norms, institutions and so on that will concretize the concept in a new reality. A critical metaphysics, as opposed to a fully committed negativism, is the means by which we can comprehend this social ontology, this social totality and its objective features and ground immanent critique. Negation cannot be circumscribed by the non-conceptual; it cannot commit itself to the view that the reified, ontic world is all there is. Instead, the ontological must

open up before us by seeing how the concept of the good is one that is realizable via our norms and practices and that these norms and practices are ambient within rationally structured institutions organized for the common purpose of human freedom and individual self-realization.

But Adorno persists in seeing Hegel's philosophy as supporting the tendency toward the administered, false totality. He is unable to see the critical nucleus in Hegel's conception of the concept and his metaphysics of reason. Negation's potency is not merely one where the false concept can be undermined, it is also an index for what the proper, rational expression of the object must be. Indeed, if we see reason as having a metaphysical structure, as I have been suggesting, then the crucial moment for critical reason is its capacity to distinguish between the that which is defective and irrational but nevertheless *existent* but viewed as a reified and static reality (the ontic) and that which is rationally potential within the object domain itself given a transformation of our practices, norms, relations and institutions (the ontological). This means that reification is broken down once the world is opened up for us as an ontological field rather than as a statically posited "reality." For Adorno, this distinction between the ontic and the ontological does not exist and, as a result, Hegel's philosophy becomes a defense of the existing world:

> Whoever relies on the limited activity of one's own understanding Hegel calls, using a political epithet, *Raisonneur* and accuses of vanity because he does not reflect on his own finitude, is uncapable of subordinating himself to something higher, the totality. However, for Hegel this higher thing is the present conditions. Hegel's aversion to critique goes together with his thesis that the real is rational. According to Hegel's authoritarian directive, that person is truly in control of his reason who does not insist on reason's antithesis to what presently exists, but rather within the given reality recognizes his own reason. The individual citizen is supposed to capitulate before reality.[37]

37 T.W. Adorno, "Critique." In *Critical Models.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 281-288, 282.

But we can see that, given my account of Hegel's metaphysical conception of reason, Adorno's is a serious misreading of Hegel's theory of the concept and its realization with real implications for critical consciousness.

IV

If we can now see the limits of Adorno's negativism, what is the relevant concept that needs to stand at the center of the critical-ontological account of immanent critique I am proposing? I think that it must be found within the ontological status of the social itself and, in relation to it, the concept of the rational society more specifically. For Adorno, the powerful idea of contradiction and non-identity is central. The negative seeks out the contradictions repressed by the reified manifold of the totality; it resists any identification of the ways of thought with the way the world is merely presented to us. But *contradiction* is not merely conceptual in some noumenal Kantian sense, it is *ontological*: it concerns the objective norms, values, practices, relations and institutions that instantiate social reality and which are rooted in distinctively human practices and norms. Negative dialectics can help us with a critical theory of judgment when it is able to achieve what I call *ontological coherence* or to have in view the ways that our norms, practices, relations, social processes and ends are organized and how these are either freedom-enhancing or heteronomous, exploitive, and so on. My relation to the social world achieves ontological coherence when I am aware (i) of the social-relational processes that actually constitute the social world; and (ii) when I am able to understand that these relations are rational only when they are structured interdependently and according to common purposes and ends. Outside of this, I remain reified and unable to articulate critical judgment.

Critical consciousness can be revived not only through resistance to the reified world; the reified world can only radically be critiqued through the contradiction between the rational concept and the defective, ontic social forms that pervade our reality. This proceeds from an important thesis about the nature of human sociality itself, one that posits that the essence of human life is the inherent social-relatedness and

practical substrate of the species itself. This essence is realized historically in different institutional forms. The Hegelian premise is that there are certain (rational) metaphysical properties of that sociality that qualify it as free and self-determining as opposed to alienating, dependent and so on. Critique, on this view, is not formal and abstract, but derived from the contradictions that are ontically present. Hence, the child abused by a parent can understand that as defective by understanding what the proper relational practices of a family are, how they would derive their legitimacy from the fact that they cultivate a free personhood as opposed to exploitive, domination-relations. The moment of immanent critique must come into play when we ask about the relevant ways that these institutions and practices are structured and whether these embody the objective conditions of freedom. So now contradiction can be recast via a critical metaphysics by grasping how the ontology of our relations, practices, institutions are oriented and what purposes or ends they serve. The irrational moment now can be seen as rooted in the practices that we instantiate and the negative now takes on a more compelling role: it can now be used to reveal the ways that our subjective consciousness is compelled via socialization to uptake the norms that sustain and maintain an irrational social reality.

Now we can see critical social ontology as expressing a *negative ontology* that can explode the reified world of the ontic. Indeed, Adorno is correct when he argues: "[D]ialectical negation is not a simple correction, or counter-claim, to a false thought but, rather . . . the further extension, or, as Hegel rightly describes it, the development of the initial thought, and thus the remedying of its defective character."[38] But he then allows a slippage into the non-conceptual and the particular, thereby undermining the force of the negative, obfuscating rather than illuminating the rational principles that undergird free, self-determining sociality. Once we grasp the repressed dimension of social reality as praxis, then we need to see that this praxis is shaped and organized in specific ways. It is not enough simply to look for the repressed non-con-

38 T.W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 32.

ceptual aspects of our social reality. Such a conception of the "open" dialectic is itself prone to reification: to romantic and irrational expressions of freedom. We are left with a form of critique without a ground. But critique must mitigate against this. It cannot fear the positing of what rational principles underwrite the practices and purposes of a self-determining social world.

It is important to keep in mind that dialectical reason needs to be able to express the *rational* (as opposed to that which is merely *rationalized*) as a consequence of contradiction: to locate a social contradiction, in this sense, means to perceive how the ontic is a defective expression of the potential inherent in the developed concept of social freedom, or a system of relations, norms, institutions, social processes and ends that provide self-determining agency and the requisite universal self-consciousness for its maintenance. From this, a critical social ontology can be unfolded that provides *ontological coherence*, a more compelling ground for immanent critique – one that opens insight not only cognitively into the contradictions of the ontic features of the prevailing reality, but, more essentially, insight into the kinds of relations, norms, institutions and social ends that ought to command our rational duties, to the kind of social reality that would be freedom-enhancing.[39] The centraliy of a critical social ontology in contrast to a negative dialectic is that it re-animates the philosophical insight into the centrality of praxis as the basis for a critical theory of society. Negative dialectics, as I have sought to argue here, robs the Hegelian theory of the concept of its metaphysical implications – metaphysical in the sense that it entails a dialectical enganement with the world and the the constitution of social reality. As Karel Kosík rightly argues: "The onto-formative process of human praxis is the basis for the possibility for ontology, i.e. for understanding being. The process of forming a (socio-human) reality is a prerequisite for disclosing and comprehending reality in general . . . . Praxis is not man's being walled in

39 I discuss the concept of *ontological coherence* with more depth in my book, *The Specter of Babel: A Reconstruction of Political Judgment*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020).

the idol of socialness and of social subjectivity, but his openness toward reality and being."[40]

Really what we are asking then is not about the ways negation leads to the non-conceptual, rather it seems more fruitful to move negation back to its Hegelian origins: toward the ways that rationality and universality are *negated by a social system rooted in particularism*. What I mean by this is that we should see capitalist society essentially as an expression of particularist interests and projects: namely, the extraction of surplus for private, particular projects and ends. Capitalism is indeed a total system, but it is a false totality to the extent that it allows private power over public, common processes.[41] This should be where immanent critique leads us: toward a politically viable terrain for social transformation. The more deeply capitalism penetrates social life, the more it re-organizes social relations and institutions, creates new norms for "efficient" means, and re-programs society's ends and purposes toward its own goals (e.g., the accumulation of surplus value). It is not the particular that we should use against the totality, but the rational universal against the *false* totality *rooted in particularism*.[42] Hegel's syllogistic structure of the concept returns with critical force: the particular's capacity to mediate the world via rational universality articulates a new form of critical individuality – a higher mode of cognition that can undermine the defective forms of life patterned by the irrational society. A rational, freedom-enhancing universality bursts asunder the false totality once we can see how it dis-

40 Karel Kosik, *Dialectics of the Concrete: A Study on Problems of Man and World*. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1976), 139.

41 Marx notes that this particularism – or the ideology of atomistically rooted self-interest – is itself opposed to the "communal interest" of society as a whole. Ideologically, capitalism projects this particularism into what is "general" which is merely a distortion of our communal interest: "Just because individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their communal interest (in fact the general is the illusory form of communal life) the latter will be imposed on them as an interest 'alien' to them, and independent of them, as in its turn a particular peculiar 'general interest.'" *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 45. Also cf. Marx's discussion in *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973), 162ff.

42 I develop this argument via Hegel's writings in my paper, "Hegel's Anti-Capitalist State." In *Discusiones Filosóficas*, vol. 14, no. 22 (2013): 43-72.

torts our social-relational lives with others and the kinds of institutional world it articulates, frustrating and negating the possibility of rational forms of relational life and social action. Non-identity can lead us to this once we are able to see that the real basis of our social world behind the fetish forms, are ensembles of practices, relations and ends. The negative is of critical use so long as it *remains rooted in the concept*.

The social-ontological categories that serve as the basis for this kind of immanent critique are derived from the phenomenological origins in self-consciousness that lead, via recognition, to the conceptual grasp of our ontological relational interdependence on others. Both Hegel and Marx share this basic thesis: namely, that we can grasp cognitively the structures and features of human social interdependence and use that as a critical means to illuminate social contradictions from within. This is because they saw universality, in social terms, not as a static category but as referring to the kinds of goods and purposes toward which our sociality was oriented. The thesis here is that social freedom becomes not a regulative ideal, but rather a robust *constitutive* feature of the relations, institutions, norms and ends that engender any social system. Freedom is real, objective when we realize our essential interdependence on one another; when we realize that common goods are themselves nutritive of individual goods; and that a critical form of individual agency is one that is able to keep this form of universality as the basis for his or her practical consciousness (or what Hegel referred to as "universal self-consciousness").

But again, this requires grasping that the essential truth of social forms are relational and practical; that our social reality is an instantiation of different norms and structures of relations that processually are organized according to certain ends or purposes. These ends and purposes are rational when they have self-determination and self-development of the members of the association as their basis and orientation. Rational because such an understanding of freedom allows not only for the fullest capacities of each member of the community, but also because it is the embodiment of the formalism of liberal ideas of equality. For Hegel,

universality is now to be a feature of the actual ontology of our relations with others, the norms we judge to warrant our obligations, and the kinds of institutions and social purposes that we would sanction as worthy of freedom. Immanent critique, negativity against the existent concepts, norms and institutions, only becomes politically viable once we are able to possess this ontological coherence, in other words, once we are able to perceive the ways that the logics of our social world frustrate or negate the rational purposes of our sociality itself. Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that Adorno did not see this. Indeed, he makes it explicit when he argues:

> By calling this society irrational I mean that if the purpose of society as a whole is taken to be the preservation and the unfettering of the people of which it is composed, then the way in which this society continues to be arranged runs counter to its own purpose, its *raison d'être*, its *ratio*. Once this has been perceived the so-called irrational institutions themselves take on a function, and the survival of irrational moments in society can be derived from the social structure itself.[43]

Here Adorno moves close to the idea of ontological coherence that I am suggesting. This passage shows that the concept of a rational society can be not merely used as the negation of the ontic, the reified existent reality. It also shows that a rational conception of society must have a purpose: that of the "preservation and unfettering of the people of which it is composed." But this insight is unreachable via Adorno's philosophical stance; he is prevented from developing this more concrete normative-critical position due to his investment in a non-conceptual negativism.

But in truth, Adorno is gesturing toward what Hegel and Marx saw as the essential moment in immanent critique: the coherence achieved by inquiring into the ways that our practices and social reality have been shaped by others and for their purposes and ends. Immanent critique now is more than resistance in some solipsistic sense. Once it is seen as

43 T.W. Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 133.

tied to the practical, that any value we hold, any norm we use to govern our practices and relations is not merely in our heads and cognitive, it is also essentially practical, then it can be grasped as either rational (freedom-enhancing) or irrational (as heteronomous, exploitive, etc.). It can be understood as a means by which we can articulate new forms of reality from new constitutive norms and practices – new norms and practices that have rational (i.e., freedom-enhancing) processes, purposes and ends. Thinking the negative must now be directed toward a critical social metaphysics: that is, toward the question of what kind of social-relational being, what kind of social substance, will pass the test of rationality; and since rationality and freedom are co-dependent concepts, we must therefore ask what kind of social reality achieves rationality i.e., freedom itself.

In order for critical theory to direct its powers toward social transformation and provide a politically useful theory of immanent criticism, we need to be able to break down the dominant concepts and norms that guide our quotidian social reality and practices. Adorno's negativism is one power means to pry the shell of reification open for critical consciousness. But as I have labored to argue here, his commitment to the non-conceptual and the particular, to an aesthetic stance for philosophical thought leads us away from a more powerful and more compelling theory of critical judgment. The negative takes on a metaphysical valence when we ask about the ways in which the social manifold itself (norms, practices, relations, processes and purposes) are shaped and how they become constitutive of my own agency. In this way, the negative can be saved from Adorno's own pessimism and solipsism. It can therefore evade the postmodern and contingent aspects of Adorno's thought and press us instead to consider the kinds of social reality that would enhance individual freedom and the kinds of social wealth, common goods and purposes that would flow from it.

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Walter Benjamin on Education as Immersive Awakening and the Need for an Ethics of the Learner

Tyson E. Lewis[1]

Abstract: This article argues for a synthesis of two different viewpoints taken on Walter Benjamin's philosophy of education. First, there is the position that focuses on education through immersion, and second, there is the position that focuses on education as awakening. The present paper offers a third approach and argues for a theory of immersive awakening. This position solves several problems that occur when immersion and awakening are divided. For instance, immersion on its own can lead to vertigo, not to mention indulgence in dangerous strands of vitalism. On the other hand, awakening without first delving into the vital powers of sleep can produce never ending shocks to the system and/or emptied bourgeois pragmatism. In conclusion, the paper argues that the virtues of fortitude, cunning, and sobriety are necessary for traversing both dimensions of education without falling into either extreme.

As of late there has been an impressive amount of literature dedicated to exploring Walter Benjamin's educational philosophy.[2] Some have returned to Benjamin's early writings on youth culture and his engagement with university reforms, others have opened up surprising insights into early childhood education, while others have argued for the relevance of Benjamin for forming an antifascist educational practice. Here I would like to highlight two articles that, when read together, generate an as-of-yet to be investigated line of inquiry germane to

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2 See for instance two special issues, including *boundary 2*, 45, no. 2 and *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 24, no. 4, both of which are edited by Charles Matthews. Also of note are Tyson E. Lewis, *Walter Benjamin's Antifascist Education: From Riddles to Radio* (New York: SUNY Press, 2020) and Dennis Johannßen and Dominik Zechner, eds. *Forces of Education: Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Pedagogy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

educational questions. The first is Ori Rotlevy's reading of the "Epistemo-Critical Forward" to Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*.[3] In this article, Rotlevy attempts to unpack the final sentence of the forward that reframes the forward as part of a practice of "ascetic schooling."[4] Rotlevy puts emphasis on Benjamin's repeated focus on the practice of *immersion* to help explicate the educational movement exemplified by the forward. Benjamin writes, "…truth content can be grasped only through the most exacting immersion in the details of a material content."[5] As such, Rotlevy defines the type of schooling provided by the forward as immersive education in and through which the subject (and its intentionality) is dissolved.

On the other hand, Howard Eiland offers up another definition of education for Benjamin: education as awakening.[6] Throughout his writings, Benjamin returned again and again to the theme of awakening. Humanity is, or so the argument goes, carrying and carried by dreams inherited from the past. These dreams are dangerous and might prevent historical awareness and anticipation (trapping the self within a mythic past) or they may act as potential raw material for awakening to historical freedom. Key to Eiland's presentation of education as awakening is this critical passage from *The Arcades Project*, "The realization of dream elements in the course of waking up is the canon of dialectics. It is paradigmatic for the thinker and binding for the historian…Every presentation of history [must] begin with awakening; in fact, it should treat of nothing else."[7] As will be discussed in more detail below, education, on this reading, is the threshold between dreaming and dialectical thinking.

3 Ori Rotlevy, "Presentation as Indirection, Indirection as Schooling: The Two Aspects of Benjamin's Scholastic Method" *Continental Philosophy Review* 50 (2017): 493-516.

4 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 39.

5 Benjamin, *Origin*, 3.

6 Howard Eiland, "Education as Awakening," *boundary 2* 45, no. 2 (2018): 203-219.

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, eds. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 464.

At this point, I can introduce my question: is education located in immersion into the dream or awakening from the dream? I hope to resolve this question by offering a synthetic argument: education as immersive awakening. To demonstrate this thesis, I will offer my own analysis of immersion and awakening in order to then propose the following: one can only awaken if one is, first, fully immersed. Immersion is therefore part of an educational movement that does not negate such immersion so much as raise it to a higher power of critical self-reflection through awakening. This synthetic understanding of education as a complex movement enables us to avoid two extremes: first, full immersion without awakening leads to vertigo or mythic vitalist tendencies, and second, awakening without immersion leads to conformism with the most superficial aspects of an historical context (no access to the deep powers of myth that well up in immersion). Clarifying the two movements of education enables us to also solve several other questions pertaining to Benjamin's educational speculations. If immersion focuses on dissolving the self into a post-intentional (non)relation with truth, then awakening is a reconstituting of the self in light of the truth encountered in immersion. And if the former is characterized by passivity, the later more directly focuses on activity predominantly. Thus, education concerns several thresholds of dispersion and reconstitution, subject and object, passivity and activity. In the end, the educational violence of this complex rhythm demands its own set of educational ethics. While undervalued in the existing literature on Benjamin and education, I conclude with an analysis of cunning, fortitude, and sobriety as educational virtues. These virtues only become apparent in certain breakdowns of the educational rhythms of immersive awakening. By reading Benjamin's analysis of the German *Trauerspiel*, the Romantics, and his critical engagements with various experiences of industrial capitalism, we can begin to recognize the role that these virtues come to play in helping the learner become the teacher, thus making intergenerational inheritance possible.

Education as Immersion

Describing early childhood, Benjamin highlights the immersive qualities of a child's perception of color. Children do not merely see color (as if color were an external property of objects). Instead, the eye itself becomes colorful. Benjamin writes, "The [child] who sees is wholly within the color; to look at it means to sink the gaze into a foreign eye, where it is wallowed up…colors see themselves; in them is the pure seeing, they are its object and organ at the same time. Our eye is colored."[8] The child is absorbed into color, or immersed into a fluctuating and nuanced color field. In fact, Benjamin describes childhood as a state of "pure receptivity"[9] or pure passivity that gives itself over to color, yielding to its all-over, shimmering qualities. And this state of pure receptivity is described in educational terms.[10] For instance, Benjamin argues, "The imagination can be developed only by contemplating colors and dealing with them in this fashion."[11] And, "coloring-in has a purer pedagogical function than painting, so long as it makes transparent and fresh surfaces, rather than rendering the blotchy skin of things."[12] Coloring-in does not reduce color to a predicate of things (blotchy skin) nor does it separate out the continuous flux into specific colors, but rather maintains the autonomy of color as a pure mood or atmosphere that colors the world. Thus, the earliest experience of education is one of immersion in a color field.

Likewise, education as immersion is described in a letter written in September of 1917 to Benjamin's friend Gerhard Scholem. In this letter, Benjamin describes *Lehre* (teaching) as a "surging sea, but the only

8 Walter Benjamin, *Early Writings (1910-1917)*, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 218.

9 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 51.

10 See also Eli Friedlander, "Learning from the Colors of Fantasy," *boundary 2* 45, no. 2 (2018): 111-137 for a more detailed analysis of the connections between color and education in early childhood in Benjamin's work.

11 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 51.

12 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 51.

thing that matters to the wave (understood as a metaphor for the person) is to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks."[13] Here, the fundamental movement of education is described in terms of surrendering to a surging sea. In less metaphoric language, we can summarize the sentence as describing the need for students to immerse themselves within tradition as it is passed down from generation to generation. This tradition is surging with certain unfulfilled powers, a "living abundance,"[14] that enables the student who is learning to transform him/herself into one who teaches, and thereby rejuvenate the abundance of a tradition now inherited. Interestingly, through this process, the learner does not so much emerge as a unified self. Instead, the self (as wave) is absorbed by the sea (and its powers) destined to become part of a generation that in turn "crashes" and sends "spray into the air."[15] Thus, the learner as individual subject dissipates into a spray that is to be picked up by the next generation, and so on and so forth. We can think of "spray" in terms of inherited citations, which can be ripped out of their context, appropriated, and recontextualized by future learners. The surrender described means giving up the solidity and self-sameness of the self to an intergenerational movement that transcends the coherence and integration defining someone's individual life.

In Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, a similar educational logic is at work. As already cited above, the forward to the book ends by suggesting that the forward itself has been a practice in "ascetic schooling." This schooling begins through "exacting immersion in the details of a material content."[16] To do so, the forward encourages the reader to adopt the practice of "primal hearing."[17] Hearing is largely passive and receptive, much like surrendering one's self to the powers of the sea. It

13 Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, eds. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 95.

14 Benjamin, *Correspondences*, 95.

15 Benjamin, *Corrrespondences*, 94.

16 Benjamin, *Origin*, 3.

17 Benjamin, *Origin*, 13.

is a surrender of the self to the internal, immanent logic of the tradition, allowing the tradition to show itself, on its own terms, without imposition of preconceptions imported by the reader. Indeed, primal hearing is an educational practice of immersion through which the reader—as learner—is fundamentally altered. When listening to the "intermittent rhythms" of the text, the learner undergoes a "renunciation of the unbroken course of intention."[18] The underlying direction and orientation provided by one's intentionally guided thought is—sometimes gradually and sometimes abruptly—interrupted. The rhythms of the waves of learning and teaching are thus transformed into the rhythms of a text. In both cases, the self undergoes a fundamental transformation via immersion as a process that he/she must yield to.

Whereas knowledge can be *acquired* through a process of "questioning,"[19] truth can only be indirectly heard through primal listening. Questioning is an active gesture of interrogating texts according to one's interests, desires, curiosities, or problems. The knowledge gained from such interrogation can be held onto as an acquisition. Benjamin observes, "Knowledge is a having" that "must be held within consciousness" through which knowledge becomes a "possession."[20] Yet listening to truth interrupts the codetermining acts of inquisition and acquisition. Instead of taking up a questioning position *outside* or *over* the text, the learner stops interrupting the text in order to allow the text to interrupt him/her, renouncing the unbroken continuity of intentionality that would otherwise direct and guide the learner's interaction with a text.

Education as Awakening

While immersion seems to be predicated on a surrender and a yielding to a power greater than one's self (as in the movement of traditions between generations or the details of a text), awakening seems to be about the *emerging* of a reconstituted self from its dissipation through immersive

18 Benjamin, *Origin*, 3.

19 Benjamin, *Origin*, 5.

20 Benjamin, *Origin*, 4.

learning. As such, awakening has its own, unique educational rhythm that must be analyzed.

To begin, Benjamin writes, "…dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening"[21] from within yet against the phantasmagoria or magic dream of capitalist spectacle. This movement out of a dream is a radical disruption or discontinuity with the flow of the dream. Yet this discontinuity is also a continuity. Thus, Benjamin is able to write that "The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking."[22] Notice that for Benjamin, awakening does not negate the dream in full. Rather it blasts certain "dream elements" out of the totality of the dream in order to rearrange them, like so many dream citations. Once extracted out of the dream, the elements can be reconstituted as a constellation for critical reflection. Simply put, one is no longer immersed in the dream. Instead, one emerges from the dream bearing certain dream elements that can then be unfolded within thinking. Awakening is educational insofar as it is a discontinuous continuity. Another name for this paradoxical state is the threshold. Benjamin observes, "We have grown very poor in threshold experiences. Falling asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. (But together with this, there is also waking up)."[23] Both "falling" and "waking" are verbs that contain within them radical shifts in positionality, perspective, and orientation that potentially disrupt immersive states in which the sleeper is somehow caught in a dream's gravitational pull. We might even say that thresholds are the phenomenological opposites of immersive states. One is liminal the other is determinate.

If immersion is liberation of the self from itself (so as to encounter the truth), then awakenings are also caste as educationally liberatory but in a slightly different way. Benjamin observes, "The genuine liberation from an epoch, that is, has the structure of an awakening…."[24] Awakenings

21 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 13.

22 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 13.

23 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 494.

24 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 173.

enable critical distance from the ideological strictures, normative pressures, and habituated behaviors of an epoch. To give an example from Benjamin's later work, awakenings are movements away from the power of primordial myth and capitalist commodification toward historical understanding and potential action. The phantasmagoria of capitalism is a dream state that the bourgeois subject willingly surrendered to. Perhaps this is nowhere more apparent than in the figure of the flaneur, who "abandons himself to the phantasmagories of the marketplace."[25] Immersed in the spectacle of the capitalist dream, the flaneur is radically passive, "thinking only to look around."[26] Such thinking enables the flaneur to be a connoisseur of capitalist commodity culture, but prevents thinking *about* this culture (thus aiming beyond its phenomenological features toward a greater truth of the epoch). In short, there is no awakening, and thinking loses its critical edge. But this does not imply that such critical thinking merely cuts off the phantasmagoria of the market. Instead, dialectical thinking takes up the remnants of the dream in order to conceptualized the "not-yet conscious knowledge of what has been."[27]

Immersion is largely characterized by passivity (submitting) through primal listening. Yet awakening is portrayed as much more active. Indeed, verbs such as "falling" and "waking" seem to gesture toward a state that is neither purely passive or active, but rather transitional. Falling would thus be a transition from active to passive, and waking from passive to active. In the second case, waking does not simply happen. Rather it is active work on the part of a waking self. "The genuine liberation" discussed above is "entirely ruled by cunning."[28] Benjamin continues, "Only with cunning, not without it, can we work free of the realm of dream."[29] Notice that awakening is *work* that necessitates a certain cunning. Cunning can be thought of as a special type of intelligence and body

25 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 14.

26 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 21.

27 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389.

28 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 173.

29 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 173

of skills for setting and avoiding traps. The implication is that one cannot escape the traps and lures of the immersive dream without accruing a certain virtue of cunning. Summarizing this point, Benjamin asserts, "… the sleeper surrenders himself to death only provisionally, waits for the second when he will cunningly wrest himself from its clutches."[30] The immersion of the self into the dream dissolves the subject. But this state is only *provisional*. There is a moment of reconstituting the self that enables the active work of wresting the subject from the dream's clutches. In short, the flaneur lacked cunning, and thus could not awake from his deep sleep (in order to think dialectically about this very condition of somnambulance).

The virtue of cunning can also be connected to another aphorism of Benjamin's that likewise emphasizes the active, pursuant, strategic nature of learning. He writes, "Student and hunter. The text is a forest in which the reader is hunter. Rustling in the underbrush—the idea, skittish prey, the citation—another piece 'in the bag.' (Not every reader encounters the idea)."[31] The hunter is the embodiment of cunning, who must set traps for the prey, or in this case the elusive citations, which, once in the bag, can constellate into the form of an idea. Importantly, without the cunning of a hunter, not every reader will encounter this idea. Many will never find their prey, and instead will either get lost in the forest of the text or will be trapped (not unlike the Romantics, as discussed below). Such a depiction calls into question the passivity and receptivity emphasized by those who focus exclusively on immersive learning in Benjamin's work. When we shift to educational awakening, the student/learner/reader has a much more active role to play in the collecting of citations that are capable of pointing toward the idea (even if obliquely).

Awakening is not merely an escape—clean and simple—from the dream. The content of dialectical thinking is found in the dream. Something must be *remembered* from the experience of complete immersion

30 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 390.

31 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 802.

into the dream so that learning can happen. The hunter returns (awakens) with something "in the bag" so to speak. Benjamin writes, that the "dialectical—the Copernican—turn of remembrance" is a "technique of awakening."[32] Memory emerges out of the threshold of awakening—transitioning from the nearness and immediacy of immergence to the distance and mediacy of dialectical thought. "Memory," writes Benjamin, "brings about the convergence of imagination and thinking."[33] In other words, it takes up the dream images of the imagination and makes them available for dialectical reflection and constellating. This is why Benjamin can write that "awaking is the great exemplar of memory."[34] It exemplifies memory insofar is it reassembles past elements of experience, carrying them forward and making them available for thinking. Memory, to be more precise, is a *cunning* technique of awakening. Eiland summarizes the complexity of awakening as follows: "An awakening, as a kind of active and actualizing remembrance—that is, *historical* awakening—is understood naturally enough as something both given and achieved."[35] Awakening emerges out of what is given (receptivity to the dream and its internal dynamics in which truth lies hidden) but is also an achievement (an action that distances the self from immersion through remembrance of specific, extracted dream elements).

The Need for Synthesis

In short, I have presented two very different models of education in Benjamin's thought. One might think that Benjamin is suggesting two different, autonomous kinds of educational logic: passive immersion and active awakening. Of course, as the language of thresholds suggests, this is not simply a case of opposites. I am merely highlighting a key shift in emphasis wherein the former focuses on passive receptivity and the latter focuses on the activity of cunning work. In this section, I want to

32 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 388.

33 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 346.

34 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389.

35 Eiland, "Awakening," 204.

suggest that there is a danger when we separate the first movement from the second. In other words, what is necessary is a synthetic philosophy of education that understands the relationship between immersion and awakening and values both.

To demonstrate the need for such a synthesis, one can outline various undesirable outcomes when they are pulled apart. First, we can image a case of immersion without awakening, which has already been hinted at above with the example of the flaneur. For instance, while coloring-in is the very first pedagogical experience of children, there is also a potential danger. While color is described as a "fluid" "medium of all changes," it is also outside of time and thus outside of history. The colorful world of childhood is a "spiritual" world of "identity, innocence, and harmony."[36] As will be examined in more detail below, "…dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening."[37] Through thinking, the self awakens to history (or to be more precise, the truth of an historical epoch). To *remain* immersed in this world would thus be a failure to arrive at historical consciousness.[38] When read in relation to Benjamin's comments on awakening, and especially awakening in his later works, the implication is that some kind of educational movement beyond childhood immersion in color is necessary for dialectical thinking (and thus a shift from pure receptivity and passivity to activity).[39]

In the study of mourning plays, Benjamin more directly points toward a possible problem with immersive education. "Exacting immersion" in the details of the Baroque period can result in a profound sense of "vertigo."[40] Vertigo is when the subject is so immersed in the material of

36 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 51.

37 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 13.

38 Of course, this does not mean abandoning or negating the child's view of color either, as would be typical of adult views of color as mere predicates of external objects. The aim would be to somehow remember the education in and for imagination contained in childhood now reconfigured/recomposed through historical consciousness.

39 In *Benjamin's Antifascist Education* (2020), Lewis argues that for Benjamin, the movement from childhood to youthfulness necessitates a potentially jarring perceptual shift capable of awakening the individual into historical consciousness.

40 Benjamin, *Origin*, 39.

study that the truth becomes lost or indecipherable in a blur of details. The self gets completely absorbed into the flux of descriptions, allegorical fragments, and drifty citations that compose the material traces of the Baroque. Opposed to this, Benjamin calls for a "mode of observation coming from afar" that has the "fortitude" allowing the subject to "remain master of itself."[41] The concept of fortitude is missing in advocates of educational immersion. Because of this oversight, the virtue necessary for the self to recompose itself (master itself) after having been dispersed through a process of primal listening is lost.

Another interesting case of total immersion is found in Benjamin's interpretation of the fundamental error of the Romantics. On the positive side, the Romantics discovered the basic premises of immanent critique. They did so by fully embracing the need to immerse the reader or author into the subject matter. Benjamin summarizes the early Romantic methodology as follows: "observation fixes in its view only the self-knowledge nascent in the object; or rather it, the observation, *is* the nascent consciousness of the object itself."[42] Observation is not the projection of a subjective intention onto an object but rather is the receptive unfolding of the object's knowledge now coming to know itself. Indeed, observation "fulfills its [the work's] hidden intentions"[43] which is then raised to a higher level of articulation through subsequent criticism. Importantly, "…this process can be appropriately enacted by a number of critics each displacing the other, if these are not empirical intellects but stages of reflection personified."[44] In other words, the critic's task ceases to be a unique "empirical" personality with particular tastes, opinions, and biases. Instead, the critic must immerse the self into the object so as to become the object's self-awareness personified. Through observation, the critic passes into the work so that the work can then unfold itself through the critic. Stated simply, the early Romantics articulated an education-

41 Benjamin, *Origin*, 39.

42 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 148.

43 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 153.

44 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 153.

al theory of immersion. The positive result of this process of education in and through observation "creates for the first time the possibility of an undogmatic or free formalism"[45] outside of the "laws" of neoclassical aesthetic judgment.

But on the negative side, this process of immersion could result in an unintended celebration of potentially dangerous strands of vitalism (celebration of irrational, primal forces). The highest form of art's critical self-understanding is, for the early Romantics, the novel, which on Benjamin's interpretation, is a form that remains suspiciously close to certain organicist and vitalist potentialities. "The novel," Benjamin observes, "can in fact reflect upon itself at will, and, in ever new considerations, can mirror back every given level of consciousness from a higher standpoint."[46] Immersion into the "romantic rhythm"[47] of the novel potentially leaves the subject trapped inside the vitalistic, organicist powers of a work that can overtake critical understanding. Missing in early Romanticism is the sobriety to emerge or awaken, hence the tendency of Romanticism to inspire romantic mythologists such as Bachofen and Klages (both of whom were later adopted by fascism). In a subtle criticism of Schlegel, Benjamin warns, "Even in Schlegel's theory of the novel, the notion of prose, although it undoubtedly conditions its characteristic spirit, fails to stand clearly at its center."[48] Prose offers a "principle of sobriety"[49] or critical distance from the immersive qualities of the novel's romantic rhythms. Through immersion into the work, the work's "own reflection is awakened,"[50] but from Benjamin's perspective, such awakening of the work's self-understanding without sobriety merely reproduces the philosophical (and later political) problem of vitalism. Sobriety is an active position the subject must take to guard against these tendencies. As

45 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 158.

46 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 172.

47 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 174.

48 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 175.

49 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 175.

50 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 151.

such, the missing educational step in Romanticism is the awakening of the subject or the subject's sobering up. Sobriety seems to insert a second discontinuity into the process of immersive education. The first concerns the discontinuity within the self through immersive observation, and the second concerns the discontinuity of awakening out of immersion via sober practices of thinking and writing. This does not mean that awakening completely negates the immersive state, rather it remains as a trace within the threshold of awakening as inspiration for prose (even if such prose is sober rather than romantic). Prose remembers, collects, and organizes these traces with the added perspective of a necessary critical distance. While immersive education rejects questioning in favor of primal listening, perhaps such questioning returns on the backend as part of the reconstituting practice of sobering up the self.

There are also other examples of the dangers of immersion in Benjamin's later, more politically oriented works. For instance, in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin warns, "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces."[51] The problem with capitalism is that it is a waking dream capable of harnessing primordial, mythic powers and bringing them into reality. Immersion into this capitalist reality of unfettered productivity and profit undermines the subject's ability to awaken to the costs incurred by humanity (and the planet) under the yoke of capitalist exploitation. Capitalist forms such as *Jungendstil* decorative arts demonstrate the "infatuation with the moment" not unlike the early bourgeois obsession with genre painting which "refused to know anything of history."[52] These popular aesthetic forms immerse the viewer in perpetual self-sameness, and by doing so, prevent any kind of historical memory (and by extension, educational awakening).

Awakening without immersion is equally undesirable. When Benjamin describes his own educational experience, he essential describes a

51 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 391.

52 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 148.

type of schooling that lacks any kind of immersion that would bring to life the truth out of the deep living abundance of tradition. He describes his professors as offering only "gray, overwhelming experience"[53] that is as dull as it is devoid of spirit. "Schools," laments Benjamin, "make us indifferent."[54] Institutionalized schooling thus drains life of meaning, producing a numbing state of indifference. One can remember, but for what purpose? It seems that Benjamin's educational experience offers up an example of what happens when education is cut off from immersion in the living abundance from which each generation renews its traditions and passes them forward. Another way of stating this might be that schooling as described by Benjamin is only about the acquisition of knowledge rather than about exposure to the truth. Teachers provide examples of what it means to represent knowledge (and they perform it regularly), but they fail to present the truth. Without this crucial aspect, education produces a profound sense of indifference to a world that appears superficial, technical, overly rationalized, and administered. If the Romantic's notion of immersive education resulted in an overflow of vitalistic powers, here we have the exact opposite: being awake to a dull, colorless world.

At this point we can approach capitalism from another angle to demonstrate how it is both too immersive and too awake at the same time. As Benjamin observed, the "altered rhythm" of modern, urban life is "shock-filled."[55] The modern experience of shock is so abrupt that the *threshold* between immersion in a dream and awakening from such dream might be severed, making recollection of the dream elements impossible. The threshold is precisely what must be conserved if the movement between immersion and awakening is to bear educational value. And yet, the overwhelming nature of modern, capitalist rhythm appears to be poor in threshold experiences.[56] We can thus imagine the modern, urban

53 Benjamin, *Early Writings*, 118.

54 Benjamin, *Early Writings*, 123.

55 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 65.

56 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 494.

world as composed of nothing more than a series of perpetual shocks, or never-ending points of waking up. The alarm clock never stops ringing, thus preventing the individual from ever truly falling asleep and thus reconnecting with the immersive experience of the deep sea of abundance so important for Benjamin.

In short, the threshold between immersion and awakening must be maintained in order to avoid the dangers of both extremes (as most vividly illustrated by the various experiences of capitalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries). Given these examples, a synthesis of immersion and awakening is needed. This new model, what I am calling *immersive awakening*, involves two intersecting and mutually constituting moments of discontinuity. The first discontinuity is between the self as a coherent, unified subjectivity and its own intentional directedness in the moment of immersion. Through immersive, primal listening, the subject suspends its intended purposes, no longer grasps for knowledge, and instead surrenders to the truth content of a phenomenon. At the same time, there has to be a countervailing movement that emerges in the moment when truth presents itself. This is a moment of awakening in which the truth fortifies the subject against the vertigo of immersion. This movement is a discontinuity between the dissipating powers of the immersive dream and the active, awakening self. The first discontinuity concerns passive listening whilst the second concerns fortitude coupled with cunning work. This work then translates into sober writing.

Simply put, one is immersed in the truth (dissolving subjective intentionality so that the truth can present itself) in order to think about the truth (reconstituted intentional directedness necessary to give form to the presentation of truth). I am not suggesting this is a linear process. Instead, there are multiple thresholds involved in immersive awakening. But it is the *momentum* or *rhythm* that is important to highlight. Without toggling back and forth between immersion and awakening, passivity and activity, receptivity and cunning, there would be no education to speak of.

The Question of Educational Violence and Ethics of the Learner

A strange paradox appears if we accept immersive awakening as a viable model of education. Once immersed, how can the learner cultivate cunning in order to avoid getting forever locked in the depths of immersive listening and thus suffer from vertigo (or worse)? How to fortify the self of the learner…is there even a "self" to fortify once immersive dispersal has happened? Immersion does some violence to the self of the learner, who must surrender the self to the ebb and flow of the sea (tradition). This self crashes (disperses) into tradition (its dreams, fragments, details, and so forth). Such movement is characterized using violent language, and connects the first movement of education to Benjamin's descriptions of educational violence. Only by understanding the dynamics of educational violence can we begin to understand how it is that passive dispersal can lead to active, cunning work of an awakening self.[57] The redemption of some notion of self out of the educational violence of immersive dispersion does not deny that Benjamin was critical of notions of a bourgeois, unified, intentionally directed self.[58] Benjamin continually problematized the bourgeois reification of the self as a possessive substance. But as we will see, this does not mean a complete or absolute destruction of the self either. What is at stake here is a shift from a conception of the self as a unified "I" to a self that is an *oscillating movement* or a self that both strays from itself while also recomposing itself out of its own dissipated fragments. The educative self is, in short, an irregular rhythm.

57 While not identical to my own, the interpretations of educational violence in James Martel, "A Divine Pedagogy? Benjamin's 'Educative Power' and the Subversion of Myth and Authority," *boundary 2* 45, no. 2 (2018): 171-186 and Matthew Charles, "Towards a Critique of Educative Violence: Walter Benjamin and 'Second Education.'" *Pedagogy, Culture, and Society* 24, no. 4(2016) : 525-536 inform this reading.

58 One of the most compelling examples of this is found in the peculiar desubjectivization of the self in such "autobiographical" works as *Berlin Childhood, Around 1900*. In this text, Benjamin seems to disperse himself into the city. Reflecting on the goal of the work, Benjamin writes, "This has meant that certain biographical features, which stand out more readily in the continuity of experience than in its depths, altogether receded in the present undertaking" (*SW, V3*, 344).

But to understand how such a rhythmic notion of self (as opposed to a unified, coherent, unbroken, bourgeois sense of self) is ontologically possible, we have to first explore the destructive nature of educational violence. Educational violence is "sovereign"[59] violence in the sense that it stands outside or beyond the scope of the law that defines the human world, or in our case, the law that binds a self to itself (through its habits, ideological beliefs, and behaviors). Once separated from its self-constituting laws, the self is dispersed into the immersive experience of primal listening. This is a violence that is destructive to the projective, intentional dimensions of the self as subject over and against objects. As Benjamin cautions, "only mythic violence, not divine, will be recognizable as such with certainty…because the expiatory power of violence is invisible to men."[60] Educational violence is "invisible" or unimaginable precisely because it is beyond the intentional orientedness of the subject. In effect, it cannot become an object of inquiry (questioning) precisely because the unity of the self is no longer there to mentally conceptualize it as a phenomenon. There can be no phenomenology of educational violence. It exposes the self to an unimaginable/invisible truth that cannot be prefigured by the system of laws, habits, ideologies, and behaviors that form the self as a subject.

At the same time, it is important to note that while educational violence is destructive, it is not absolutely so. As Benjamin writes, "To this extent it is justifiable to call this violence, too, annihilating; but it is so only relatively, with regard to goods, right, life, and suchlike, never absolutely, with regard to the soul of living."[61] Educational violence would therefore annihilate the markers of a subject identifiable within a particular, constituted world. The reified self of capitalism, for instance, would no longer be recognizable as it would cease to be defined as a "self" in possession of goods, rights, life, and suchlike. Read in an educational register, dispersal would therefore only be *relative* annihilation of the

59 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 252.

60 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 252

61 Benjamin, *SW, V1*, 250.

self. Through immersion, the self might very well dissipate. Indeed, it is necessary for the self to undergo this violence. But this is not *absolutely* destructive. Instead, a minimal self remains (what Benjamin refers to as a soul). The minimal traces of the self in its dispersal are not abandoned, but rather retained through the immersive process.

Indeed, we can think of educational violence as having the inverse effect on the self as with mythic violence. On my reading, mythic violence leaves nothing but the goods, rights, life, and suchlike that form the recognizable subject position binding the self to the law. Mythic violence is antieducational insofar as it leaves these husks of life denuded of a more basic power to animate them. Mythic violence, we might say, produces dead knowledge and hollowed out subject positions. Teachers who profess such knowledge do not support education, creating a grey and dull world that does not have meaning or relevance to learners (as indicated by Benjamin's own experiences recounted above). Educational violence, on the other hand, destroys those superficial features of life created and then preserved by mythic violence. It clears the grounds or creates a clearing in experience for immersive listening to happen—a form of listening that does not project goods, rights, life, and suchlike onto phenomena precisely because these have been sacrificed in the name of an unimaginable encounter with the truth. Indeed, primal listening is primal only insofar as the self who listens is radically poor in the very marks of subjectivity valued within a given understanding of goods, rights, life, and so forth.

Educational violence does not create a new law, nor does it preserve existing law. The discontinuity of immersive education is not law preserving insofar as the law of the self—its tastes, values, and defining ideological positions—is suspended through an immersive experience of dissipation. It is equally not lawmaking because both immersion and awakening do not produce the truth (as if it were merely another product of the subject). Rather the truth is illuminated through immersion in such a way as to reorganize what already exists into a new constellation. Indeed, there is no creation here at all, merely a process of constellating elements (extremes).

Immersive awakening embodies educational violence insofar as it dissolves the self, and is therefore a violence over various culturally and historically conditioned and sanctioned forms of subjectivity. It also exposes the dissolved self to that which is unimaginable (the truth) out of bounds of the parameters of the finitude of subjectivity. At stake here is the question of how the self awakens itself from this educational violence. What enables it to do so? What makes the dispersal of the self through immersion a relative rather than absolute state? We have established that some minimal traces of the self remain in their dispersal, and as such there is ontological ground for asking this question. But the question itself needs resolving.

Without fortitude, cunning, and sobriety, the poor, minimal self that remains in its dispersal will not be able to extricate itself from immersion. These dangers are best captured in Benjamin's reflections on the case of the brooder whose immersion might be so intense that only a shock can disrupt its powers. The brooder is "at home among allegories,"[62] utterly losing himself. Brooders are fully immersed in the details and fragments of their studies to the point where they have "forgotten" any solution they might have discovered. The brooder is therefore distinct from the thinker. Whereas the former has lost the ability to think about thinking (re-member thoughts that have dispersed amongst the fragments), the latter has retained this ability and therefore "mediates his mediation of the thing."[63] Given the brooder has fully immersed him or herself and has subsequently lost the ability to remember, this melancholic figure is utterly passive and cannot undertake the cunning work needed to awaken. There is no mastery of the self. Instead, the only hope for the brooder is the possibility of a "shock" which "rouses the startled allegorist from his brooding."[64] The brooder can only wait for the miracle of the shock, not unlike sleeping beauty who, in an unpublished forward to his postdoctoral thesis, *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, "awakens" from

62 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 328.

63 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 369.

64 Benjamin, *Arcades*, 383.

immersive sleep through the shill sound of a cook boxing the ears of a busboy.[65] In both cases, these immersed figures find themselves trapped precisely because they lack the virtues necessary to emerge from within the density of allegorical fragments or the weight of mythical powers or the lure of capitalist commodification. The only recourse is to wait for the coming of a shock to jumpstart a process. But there is no guarantee that such a shock will enable one to remember the immersive dream and by extension, there is no guarantee that such shock will promote/activate thinking.

In conclusion, I suggest that we pay heed to Benjamin's various critical interrogations of Baroque period plays, his immanent critique of the Romantics, and his theory of capitalist subjectivity through which he suggests a set of virtues necessary for navigating the educational violence of immersive awakening (as a complex process of irregular rhythms). Bringing these virtues together, I argue that an ethics of the truth demands (a) passive receptivity to the truth, followed by (b) *fortitude* to master the self (that was dispersed), (c) *cunning* work needed to jumpstart awakening by avoiding traps, and (d) *sobriety* to teach (to point indirectly at the truth through one's subsequent prose).

Because it is violent, there needs to be an ethic of education, which I have summarized here as equal parts receptivity, cunning, fortitude, and sobriety. Undervalued in the existing Benjaminian scholarship, I have attempted to demonstrate that educational violence necessitates a complex ethical theory that emerges out of the various stages of immersive awakening. The truth fortifies the fragments of a dissipated self. In other words, it generates a focal point that gives new orientation to a self that was otherwise adrift (as a wave) in abundant details. The fortified self is no longer merely passively receptive to the forces and powers of the sea of details but has a certain capacity for the active work of awakening. The fortified self must be cunning in order to avoid the traps of vertigo and vitalism that can still overtake it. Cunning enables the fortified subject of truth to begin to awaken, distancing the self from total immersion so that

65 Benjamin, *Correspondences*, 295.

the self can begin to remember, and through memories, pose questions. Sobriety is the final virtue necessary to transform an experience of the truth as a learner into a teaching (in the form of prose that can be inherited by future generations).

Of course, the learner's encounter with various kinds of texts and subject matter will impact the proportion of fortitude, cunning, and sobriety that are necessary. For instance, some subject matter will *actively* resist the learner and the rhythms of immersive awakening. Here, I am thinking of the "text" of capitalism with its powers to dirempt immersion from awakening, producing two separate conditions that, when taken to extremes, become increasingly anti-educational. In such a condition, it is all too easy for the learner to become trapped in one state or another, proving Benjamin's point that capitalism is poor in threshold experiences. To work against these trends, the learner must cultivate maximal fortitude, cunning, and sobriety (as Benjamin himself was undoubtedly able to do). On the other hand, texts such as Benjamin's own writings are carefully constructed to support and encourage immersive awakening. Yet, even in such cases, some minimal amount of fortitude, cunning, and sobriety are still needed in order to enter into the texts, navigate their complexity, and emerge on the other side with the ability to ask critical questions and write sober prose of one's own (thus continuing the wave of learning and teaching described by Benjamin). Indeed, the famous "Epistemo-Critical Forward" to Benjamin's work on the German *Trauerspiel* is explicitly framed as an educational aid for the reader entering the text.[66] In other words, no matter how sophisticated a set of pedagogics might be, the educational violence that adheres to any attempt to "teach" or "show" the truth will call for a mixture of fortitude, cunning, and sobriety. It is too Benjamin's credit that he recognized this about his own texts and prepared his readers (as learners) for the experience (even if some did

66 We can even go so far as to argue that the fascists who read and admired Benjamin's early work on the German *Trauerspiel* fell victim to the vitalist potentials of his text, and thus failed to awaken from the immersive qualities of Benjamin's writing. See Jane O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library: Modernity, Nation, and the Baroque* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

not ultimately listen). It remains an open question how we, in the current historical moment, might continue the educational experiments of Benjamin, inventing new pedagogies of indirection that help scaffold the process of immersive awakening so as to avoid vertigo, fascist vitalism, or capitalist fetishism while maintaining the need for preserving the truth. Given the rise of increasingly short attention spans due to the fast-pace of social media, the dominance of global fascist movement that promote hardness and coldness, and the omnipresent pressures of capitalist media spectacle, the educational stakes could not be higher.

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On the Psychoanalytical Grammar of Adorno's Typology of Ego Weakness[1]

Lilith Poßner[2]

Abstract: The recent rereading of the *Studies in the Authoritarian Personality* brought forward some efforts in updating their key concept's theoretical frameworks, though far less attention went into research sufficiently understanding the *Studies* and their construction's internal logic from today's perspective. This paper strives to fill part of this hermeneutical hole by proposing a reading of Adorno's construction of different types of ego weakness that will explicate the syndromes among high scorers as following an intrinsically coherent psychoanalytical grammar. To this purpose, I will proceed in two steps: One must first determine a concept of ego organization in whose light other forms can be indicated as deficient, so that one is able to understand what renders the subject ego weak and thus guarantees the conceptual unity of Adorno's different types. Secondly, I will show that the typology's logic of stratification is easily understood when it is read as built along the different possible grammatical forms of thwarting the becoming conscious of the sentence "I judge the father" and its meaning. The specific authoritarian fixations of the different syndromes are defenses against the subject's detachment from the father, by objecting either to the sentence's grammatical object, its subject, or its verb.

1 This paper is a translated and modified version of the chapter on ego weakness from the publication *Verwerfung statt pathische Projektion? Dialogische Überlegungen zum Wahnbegriff bei Horkheimer/Adorno und Lacan* (Oldenburg: Studien zur materiellen Kultur, 2022).

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The political rise of the alt-Right within western democracies has sparked a new interest in the Frankfurt School's research on authoritarianism and its sociopsychological conditions. This rereading of the *Studies in the Authoritarian Personality* and the sociopsychological writings surrounding them has brought forward some efforts in updating their key concept's theoretical frameworks, though far less attention has gone into research sufficiently understanding the *Studies* and their construction's internal logic from today's perspective.[3] It is not only true that they are in need of being updated, but also that their potential scientific audience has radically diminished. This loss of hermeneutical competence within the scientific audience as a whole is mostly to be ascribed to the massive loss of meaning that psychoanalysis has suffered as a scientific discipline from the dominance of positivistic psychology in the field as well as the marginalization of Marxist approaches within sociology.

This paper strives to fill part of this hermeneutical gap by proposing a reading of Adorno's construction of different types of ego weakness in the *Studies* that will explicate the syndromes among high scorers as following an intrinsically coherent psychoanalytical grammar. Adorno himself names three basic reasons for the construction of a typology of syndromes: one being sociological, one pragmatic and one epistemological. His sociological argument evolves around the historically contingent spreading of standardization in society, producing itself a need for standardized individuals, so that the manifold of possibly diverse subjects

3 For such attempts see Katrin Henkelmann et al., *Konformistische Rebellen: Zur Aktualität des Autoritären Charakters* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2020). Lars Rensmann, *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Antisemitism* (Albany/New York: SUNY Press, 2017). Samir Gandesha, "'Identifying with the aggressor': From the Authoritarian to Neoliberal Personality," in *Constellations*, 25:1, 2018, 147–164. Moreover, Eva von Redecker currently works on a paper with the working title "Ideologies of Desire. A Possible Typology of Authoritarian Characters"; see Eva von Redecker, "Research," *evredecker.net*, accessed September 5, 2022, https://www.evredecker.net/research/.
For an overview about the development of the concept within the disciplinary borders of psychology see Garreth Norris, *The Developing Idea of the Authoritarian Personality: An Historical Review of the Scholarly Debate, 1950–2011* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwen Mellen Press, 2012). Bill E. Peterson and Eileen L. Zurbriggen, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Authoritarian Personality," in *Journal of Personality* 78:6, 2010, 1801–1803.

is already streamlined by introjecting said standards in accordance with the societal regulations of power and domination.[4] Thus, a typology of individuals in an unfree society is possible and accurate because they are already typed by it.[5] Adorno's pragmatic argument, however, insists on the necessity of stratifying different target groups for more effective antifascist countermeasures against the possible rise of fascism. Typology is here an economic means for balancing the poles of individualization and generalization with respect to distributing the available, but limited resources for that more effectively.[6] Last, his epistemological argument develops around the notion that psychological comprehension of individual experiences is only possible insofar as this experience is meaningful and thus "inevitably involves generalizations transcending the supposedly unique 'case'"[7]. These three arguments, however convincing they may be, are only arguments for the use of typologies in psychology *in abstracto* and thus do not sufficiently explain the construction of syndromes among high scorers *in concreto*.

Picking up the Lacanian notion that the psychological meaning Adorno grasps theoretically is essentially symbolically organized, I will attempt to show that his typology's logic of stratification is most easily understood when it is read as built along the different possible grammatical forms of thwarting the becoming conscious of the sentence "I judge the father" and its meaning. Moreover, the proposed interpreta-

4 See Theodor W. Adorno, S*tudies in the Authoritarian Personality*, in GS 9.1 (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2003), 458–459.

5 Stefan Niklas hints at the gap the *Studies* had to bridge between the postulation of standardized societal classification of individuals into more or less rigid types and scientifically finding said actual types. For Niklas, the *Studies* tried to bridge this gap by means of qualitative interpretation of particular cases which cannot said to be wrong in itself, but still leaves open the question of how the types were constructed in the first place. This paper argues as follows: If authoritarian ego weakness generally appears in the defense against the subject's judgement of the father, then there are only limited options this defense can use for suppression which are predetermined by the grammatical structure of the judgement in question. This may not fully explain the historical manifold present within each one of the constructed types but does explain the basic logic of each of their respective forms of authoritarian fixation. See Stefan Niklas, "On the reissue of *The Authoritarean Personality*," in *Krisis* 41:1, 2021, 205–206.

6 See Ibid., 460.

7 Ibid., 459.

tion of Adorno's typology aligns with the methodology of Freud's reconstruction of the different types of paranoia in his analysis of the case of Schreber, working by the same grammatical logic that I will try to reconstruct in the *Studies*.[8] This methodological parallel between Freud and Adorno – clearly becoming visible through a Lacanian perspective on psychoanalysis – is more than just a coincidence. Adorno's idea of ego weakness draws on Horkheimer's and his theory of paranoia developed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that itself heavily draws on Freud's metapsychological writings about psychosis and narcissism and is later picked up again by Adorno in the *Minima Moralia* and others of his writings.[9] That is not to say that Adorno consciously put Freud's grammatical logic of construction onto the concept of the authoritarian personality without attributing his specific work. But it does take seriously the idea that psychoanalysis is nothing but the analysis of language and speech, so that there is no other place for the unconsciousness to appear than in speech itself or to appear as speech.[10] Adorno's typology works similar to Freud's, which is grammatical, because psychoanalysis inherently is speech analysis interested in the unconsciousness as structured like a language prefiguring actual speech.[11] The psychoanalytical task is, as

8 Sigmund Freud, *The Case of Schreber*, Standard Edition XII (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 63–65.

9 The terms of positivistic and idealistic subject-object-relation within segment six of the *Elements of Antisemitism* match the epistemological positions of the manipulative and the crank. Reflecting on the connection between this chapter and the Studies Adorno writes: "The chapter *Elements of Anti-Semitism* in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* […] was obligatory for my part of the investigation later conducted with the Berkeley Public Opinion Study Group. They had their literary condensation in the 'Authoritarian Personality'." Cited in Rolf Tiedemann, "Editorische Nachbemerkung," in Theodor W. Adorno, GS 9.2 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 412 (trans. by me, L.P.). For an exploration of the inherent theoretical connections of both works see Niklas, "On the reissue of *The Authoritarean Personality*," 202–209.
In the *Minima Moralia* for example the 'tough guy' and the 'manipulative' appear again in aphorisms 24 "*Tough Baby*" and 147 "*Novissimum Organum*".

10 It appears *in* speech in jokes, Freudian slips, resistances and so on as the negation of intended speech; it appears as speech in dreams or the neurotic symptom insofar as an image took on a symbolic value.

11 This is coherent with the *Studies* concept of personalities as psychological dispositions of the subject tending towards certain patterns of thought and behavior while rejecting others. Their personality is one relatively constant determining factor, but not the only

Freud once put it for interpreting the dreams, to treat the subject and all of the subject "as Holy Writ"[12].

In the process of the pending analysis, I will proceed in two steps: Before reconstructing Adorno's different types of ego weakness, one must first at least briefly determine a concept of ego organization in whose light other forms can be indicated as deficient, so that one is able to understand why it is the sentence "I judge the father" whose objection to renders the subject ego weak and thus guarantees the conceptual unity of these different types. Adorno sometimes refers to this ideal type as the "autonomous, i.e., mature human being"[13] and describes its formation as follows:

> The process is that children – Freud named this normal development – generally identify with a father figure, that is an authority, internalize it, make them their own, and then, in a very painful process never succeeding without scars, learn that the father, the father figure, does not match the ego ideal that they have learned from him, thereby detaching themselves and only in this way become mature human beings at all. The moment of authority is, I think, presupposed as a genetic moment by the process of maturation.[14]

I will now reconstruct this process in a boiled down way, so that afterwards one can understand, how the father might interfere in the detachment process for the child to develop a dependent, inappropriate relationship to authority.[15] Rather than fully explaining Adorno's concept of

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one that prefigures their actual speech acts; see Adorno, "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 154–156.

12 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition IV/V (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 514.

13 Theodor W. Adorno and Hellmut Becker, „Erziehung zur Mündigkeit", in Adorno and Becker, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit: Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959–1969* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 139–140 (trans. by me, L.P.).

14 Ibid., 140.

15 Along the way I will not translate the German "Trieb", as Strachey usually does in the *Standard Edition*, to instinct, but will use the more accurate term drive. The drives are not instincts at all. Postulating them as instincts would rob their aims of their substitutability and thus devoid them of their specific conceptual character (See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: Seminar XI* (London, 1994), 49). Adorno explicitly distinguishes between authority to be recognized, for example subject authority or – in certain phases of maturation – the father's authority, and inappro-

personalities of quasi-grown-ups, I will focus only on the authoritarian fixation's logic, around which these personalities develop, and the different forms it may take.

Maturation and Autonomous Ego Organization

In the initial stages of socialization, the infant must submit to what they encounter as an arbitrary system of symbolically organized rules rewarding certain renunciations and sanctioning certain satisfactions, being enforced by their father.[16] They can direct their aggression arising from these denials against them or against themself. If they direct it against their father, the fulfillment of their aggressive drive's aim cannot be immediately successful in every case, even if it results in overthrowing the prohibition in some or even many individual cases. Consequently, there are always cases in which the expressed aggression comes to nothing and thus does not result in what Freud calls an "*alloplastic*"[17], satisfying change of the external world, which the child would be able to achieve merely by their father's mediating cooperation; or their expressed aggression is sanctioned. In either case the aggression cannot reach its aim and the aim of the originally unfulfilled or sanctioned drive; in the latter case, further aggression is introjected into the child's psyche by the father's sanction.[18]

priate forms (See Adorno and Becker, "Erziehung zur Mündigkeit," 139. Theodor W. Adorno, "Meinung Wahn Gesellschaft," in GS 10.2 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 575).

16 The father is being understood as a personal instance of what Lacan calls the "name of the father" (Jacques Lacan, *Die Psychosen: Das Seminar III* (Wien/Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2016), 116 (trans. by me, L.P.)), or the "function of the father" (Ibid., 377 (trans. by me, L.P.)) that is to introduce the infant into the symbolic order, which has nothing to do with the biological father. The author understands the father-function to be only contingently intertwined with personal representatives of a certain gender (See Hermann Lang: "Die Konzeption des 'Vaters' bei Sigmund Freud," in Hermann Lang: *Strukturale Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 149–155).

17 Sigmund Freud: "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis," in *Standard Edition XIX* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 185.

18 This paper distinguishes between introjection and identification as two different mechanisms of internalization as proposed by the work of Mathias Hirsch. Introjection only means the process through which an object or an aspect of it is internalized without yet determining the concrete relation that the different psychic instances or

Since the outward turn remains ineffective, the unsatisfied aggression seeks a substitute object, finding it in the sanctioned drive, against which it now turns. Because the dependent child cannot endanger their father's love for them, they identify themself with the father's aggression introjected into them. By this means, they can partially satisfy their aggression against the father's prohibition on the way of substitute satisfaction and at the same time avoid disturbances of their relationship. The originally sanctioned drive either turns to socially recognized aims on the way of sublimation or is permanently displaced by countercathexis with aggression, like the remaining aggression against the authority is repulsed by countercathexis with libido. And so, loving the father produces the libidinal cathexis of their code. Because the child loves their father and needs to be loved by them, the infantile ego will internalize their authority, erecting their commands and prohibitions and their rules of application and subsumption in a complex process of introjection and identification as their superego against the tabooed impulses of the id. Thus, they try to bring their drive structure into harmony with the demands of their social environment.[19] However, in order for them to behave as they *should*, the child must likewise be able to sufficiently internalize and recognize what *is*:

> "The subject creates the external world once again from the traces it leaves in their senses: the unity of the thing in its manifold properties and states; and they thus retroactively constitute the ego, by learning to confer synthetic unity not merely on the external, but also on the internal impressions gradually separating from them."[20]

The same abilities the subject's psyche must develop for understanding

self's aspects have to it. In contrast, in Hirschs terminology identification presupposes the introjected object's aspect as egosyntonic. See Mathias Hirsch, *Schuld und Schuldgefühl: Zur Psychoanalyse von Trauma und Introjekt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 109–120. Mathias Hirsch, „Zwei Arten der Identifikation mit dem Aggressor nach Anna Freud und Sándor Ferenczi," in *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie*, 45 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 198–205.

19 See Adorno, "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 155.

20 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1989), 211 (trans. by me, L.P.).

others and for self-observation and self-censorship, i.e. for learning and adhering to the social code in order to organize their own drive structure in correspondence with it, however, increasingly enable them to also take note of the father's taboo-violations. The resulting dilemma between the libidinal cathected code and the libidinal cathected father-object can be resolved by the ego in different directions:

1. They can change themself by taking the father's mistake upon themself, thus repressing it and holding on to the irrevocable authority of the father-object.
2. They can change their understanding of the rule, by developing their superego; but only insofar as the father's taboo-violation represents a plausible addition to or exception from the social code already known to the ego.
3. They can modify the father-object by holding onto the validity of the rule; but this means degrading the authority of the father from whom the social code was at first received.

Questioning the father's absolute authority thus entails the possibility of questioning the authority of the code – and this through the autonomous judgment of the ego, who no longer depends on the father-object as an internalized external authority as their judgement's source. In this way, the ego simultaneously overcomes their judgement's dependence on the *personal* father-object and its special, traditional rules, realizing the reality principle's *abstracted* demand on their drive structure as rule-like in general. Respecting paternal authority thus produces the child's ego not only as a *controlling* instance of the id, but also virtually as a *judging* instance on authority and its standards. The judgment about the authority coincides with the shift of the authority of judgment away from the authority and towards the ego. Only when becoming autonomous, they fully exercise their actual function as a mediating instance between outside world, superego, and id.[21] Thus, maturation is this process of introjection, identification, and detachment, during which the ego initially receives their judgment's standards as handed down from an external

21 See Adorno, "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 201–202.

authority. This is internalized at first only superficially out of fear and necessity, but it enables the subject to learn making independent judgments precisely with the help of said standards. However, this process of detachment can be disturbed in its development.

The Externalization of Ego and Superego

As previously outlined, degrading the father-object's authority is not the only way out of the subject's dilemma, opened by the father's taboo-breaking. Detaching through degradation of their father's authority produces dissent and dissidence, and thus conflict in the subject's relationship to their father, which was previously harmonized by the authority-bound form of relationship formation. For the subject to successfully detach themself, their attempt must not appear to them to be sufficiently unpleasurable, to sufficiently *prevent* the fulfillment of their needs, or even to threaten their existence.[22] Fear of the sheer amount of aggression introjected into the subject by an "oppressive, brutal, and overpowering father"[23] in reaction to defying their authority or a general lack of fatherly love can thus prevent the necessary identification with, and appropriation of, the paternal code, which appears in the ego's autonomous judgment about their father.

> Weakness in the ego is expressed in the inability to build up a consistent and enduring set of moral values within the personality; and it is this state of affairs, apparently, that makes it necessary for the individual to seek some organizing and coordinating agency outside of himself. Where such outside agencies are depended upon for moral decisions one may say that the conscience is externalized.[24]

Three logical connection points can be determined here, through which the father's aggression can make an initial detachment impossible, thus disrupting successful identification with the paternal code. The defense against autonomy which resists the sentence "I judge the father" can object

22 See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 215.

23 Adorno and Becker, "Erziehung zur Mündigkeit," 141 (trans. by me, L.P.).

24 Adorno, "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 202.

to its grammatical *object*, its grammatical *subject*, or its grammatical *verb*.

I. Rigidity

If the father gives a sufficiently coherent code but excludes their authority from the enforcement of said code, while the fear of paternal aggression or the subject's longing for his love make it impossible for the ego to degrade his authority, then the ego's ability to judge is impaired insofar as it becomes unclear which cases are to be subsumed under the technically general standards of the social code. For the ego two separate spheres are constituted: a sphere of nonreflective social rules applying only to those subjectable to them, and a sphere of sovereign social power reserved for the father's unregulated authority.[25] The generality of the ego's judgment function is thus weakened here by the circumvention of its subsumption rules. Accordingly, this form of authority dependence has the grammar: "I don't judge the *father*." and can develop into "the 'conventional' syndrome"[26] or into "the 'authoritarian' syndrome"[27] depending on whether it is motivated by libidinal or aggressive drives.

The conventional subject follows the father because they hope for the satisfaction of their libidinous drives, which are, however, neglected by him. Thus, they subsequently develop an excessively pronounced desire for paternal love from which they are excluded: they externalize their superego because they want to be recognized as belonging; their conformism is here the means for fulfilling this purpose.[28] In contrast, the authoritarian subject follows the father because they fear his excessive aggression. As a result, they turn their own aggression against themself and develop an irrational urge to punish everything that does not conform.[29] The conventionalist is suspicious of rule-breaking: They want internal cohesion and external isolation. The authoritarian, on the other

25 See ibid., 197–200.

26 Ibid., 471.

27 Ibid., 474.

28 See ibid., 471.

29 See ibid., 475–476.

hand, needs the transgression of rules: For them, being able to punish is the condition of their social integration. The one behaves irrationally defensive towards deviation, the other irrationally aggressive.

Even if here the legitimacy of the superego's rules is made dependent on an external instance, the ego's judgment function is only partially weakened: They fundamentally retain the judgment's form of generality and the ability to subsume the particular under it, even if this generality becomes perforated. Because detachment entails the potential of questioning the code given by the father, the ego will only be able to make reflective judgments about its validity and scope during and after detachment. The code internalized as superego would thus experience an increasing logical refinement or revision by the ego, i.e. inter-instance-integration, which is absent in the crushed, "rigid, automatic and unstable"[30] ego. All elements necessary for the autonomous ego's judgment are gathered within themself, but their fear of detachment forms the starting point of organizing their defense against autonomy.

II. Indifference

The next and more severe two forms of ego weakness instantiate themselves, if the father gives a contradictory and thus incomprehensible code, whose rules are nevertheless supposed to be valid despite their inconsistency. This results in the subject not learning to judge the world and themself according to the code, but to adapt their judgment to authority's in fact intrinsically general provisions being valid only in each single case. What is suspended here in judging, by being exchanged for paternal discretion, is the validity of the standards of judgment that are in force. Thus, the generality of the code is not undermined by the father's exception to its subsumption rules, their valid generality, but is called into question by *indifference* to the general validity of the judgement's standards. Here, then, the ego's judgment function is even more fundamentally impaired.

This form of authority-dependence can take two different grammat-

30 Ibid., 201.

ic forms, the first of which is "*I* do not judge the father" and coincides with Adorno's type of the 'manipulative'.[31] To maintain the ego's relation to the external world, they negate themself as a possible subject able to judge. To the ego their judgement's standards must appear as flexibly interchangeable, which they comply with by permanently crippling their id, withdrawing almost all libidinal cathexis from their objects, and letting their drive's sources wither away: "self-preservation loses its self."[32] Thus, the ego is no longer the mediator of various inherently logically organized spheres, of which, as a mediator, they cannot be fully determined. Instead, the ego "commands"[33] the id and themself according to the demands of the external world. Because of their fear of the father's aggression, they cannot cathect their code with libido, which disables them to turn it against them. Either, they have no legitimate desire, whose claim to satisfaction they could assert against the father. As a result, the ego loses any possibility of resistance to authority's claims on their drive structure and instantiates themself as its extended arm within the subject's psyche:

> Personal characteristics, from genuine friendliness to hysterical outbreaks of rage, become serviceable, until they finally slide perfectly into their situation-specific assignment. With their mobilization, they transform themselves. They remain only as light, fixed and empty shells of impulses, as material transportable at will, devoid of personal traits. They are no longer subjects, but the subject directs itself at them as its internalized object. In their boundless accessibility toward the ego, they are simultaneously alienated from the latter: entirely passive, they no longer nourish it. That is the social pathogenesis of schizophrenia.[34]

What Adorno describes in this passage of the *Minima Moralia* as the re-

31 See ibid., 486–491.

32 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, GS 4, trans. Dennis Redmond (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), Aph. 147.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

sult of a historical process of societal conditioned schizophrenization, as *decay*, referencing the increased pressure to adapt to changing market conditions in late capitalism, appears in the ontogenesis of ego weakness, however, as a blockade of the ego's possible development. This indifferent *flexibility* of one's desire and of one's code means that not only the superego is externalized, but also the ego themself, whose degree of integration and ability to judge is entirely dependent on external circumstances. This is the reason why for Adorno this form of ego weakness follows schizophrenia. The ego's flexibility to the standards of praxis and judgement given to them renders their meaning as meaningless, which means withdrawing their libidinal cathexis. Submission to the contradictory paternal demands produces the necessity for the outside world's scotomization in order to protect the frightened ego from the father's aggression befalling them. Scotomizing the external world by means of withdrawal of libidinal cathexis is precisely how Freud characterizes schizophrenia.[35]

Now we encounter the second form of suspending judging the father by suspending judgement itself. It evolves around the objection "I do not *judge* the father.", which, developed into a personality, Adorno calls the 'crank'.[36] Here, the subject does not reject their own desire, but the symbolically organized world in which they could desire anything at all, demolishing their ability to judge in a meaningful way. Consequently, Adorno writes: "These people are driven into *Isolation*."[37] The id overtakes and determines the ego's functions, performing internal or, as Freud says: "*autoplastic*"[38] changes by modeling themself and their objects in accordance with their unfulfilled needs. But the same overwhelming fear of the father that pushes them away from external reality to construct their own, private one, also inevitably binds them to it. They are psychotic in themselves, but not for themselves, insofar as their fear

35 Freud: *The Case of Schreber*, 75–78.

36 Adorno: "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 483–486.

37 Ibid., 483.

38 Freud: "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis," 185.

of the father limits the contents of their paranoia to that which is socially recognized. Their psychosis is socially adjusted.[39] They do not manifest the necessary contradictions with respect to their social environment, which only would allow to call them pathological in a meaningful way.[40] They are not, because society is.

III. Insurrection

There is one last type of ego weakness that does not fit the scheme of objecting against the sentence "I do not judge the father," which is the psychopath.[41] Here, as in the crank, the id overtook the ego's functions, though not by autoplastic means of ego alteration, but by fully dominating the ego's alloplastic functions. The psychopath is trapped in a constant state of insurrection against the demanded renouncements of the rule-like mediation of symbolically organized society. While the crank can only retract into isolation, the psychopath is, however diluted, only able to connect to others by means of violence. They lack the capability to cooperate in a meaningful way of the term, which presupposed sufficiently mediating their drive structure within the symbolic sphere. They don't judge the father, but desire to put everything to death, including them. They don't deploy defense mechanisms against judging the father, precisely because they never entered the fundamental relationship of recognition that the father tried to wring from them, and which only would be able to motivate them keeping the purity of the father-object

39 See Rolf Pohl, „Projektion und Wahn. Adorno und die Sozialpsychologie des Antisemitismus," in Joachim Perels, ed., *Leiden beredt werden lassen: Beiträge über das Denken Theodor W. Adornos* (Hannover: Offizin, 2006), 62–73.

40 For the conventional character of the distinction between mental health and mental illness in Freudian psychoanalysis see Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," in *Standard Edition XXIII* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 195. Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," in *Standard Edition XXI* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 144. Adorno, "Meinung Wahn Gesellschaft," 578.

41 See Adorno, "Studies in the Authoritarian Personality," 479–483. For this paper's purpose, it is sufficient to engage with the psychopath as a drastic form of the type of the rebel that Adorno approaches together. It should be noted here only that their relationship to authority is differently accentuated, and although it is equally refractory and hostile, in the case of the rebel it is still accompanied by a hidden readiness to submit to it prematurely and to make a hasty pact with it.

in place. Here, one cannot speak of an externalized ego and superego because they do not exist in a strict sense as organized instances of the psyche. This form of ego weakness is not a defense against detachment, but a regressive detachment even from defense itself.

Up to this point, Adorno's theory of ego weakness has been reconstructed as the thwarting of the ego's autonomous judgment function by which they could subsume paternal authority as particular under general standards of validity and enforcement. This judgment is thwarted by their fear of detachment from the father, being grounded either in excessive longing for his love or in excessive fear of punishment by him, which both can drive the ego into scotomizing the fallibility of external authority. I was able to show that Adorno's typology of ego weakness generally can be easily understood as constructed around the defensive obscuring of different grammatical units of the sentence "I judge the father", with only the exception being the rebel and the psychopath. But even that syndrome can be understood by keeping in mind the limited forms of possible conflict resolution in Freudian psychoanalysis which are essentially determined by the economic relationships of power between the three psychic instances and the external world.[42] It is these power relations that serve the function of explaining the subject's choice of weapon in its fight against detachment which – for us – only appear in its relation to the symbolic order and thus within its or as speech.[43]

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42 See Freud, „The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis".

43 See Lacan, Die Psychosen, 185, 317. Jacques Lacan, „Das Symbolische, das Imaginäre und das Reale," in Jacques Lacan, *Namen-des-Vaters* (Wien/Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2013), 32.

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Inner Transcendence and "Beyond": The Debate in Chinese Philosophy

Roland Boer[1]

Abstract: The topic of "inner transcendence" has been an issue of considerable debate in Chinese philosophy. The purpose of this study is to indicate the main developments of the debate, beginning with the proposal itself in the hands of Mou Zongsan. From there, I move to some of the key elaborations on the proposal, specifically in terms of historical narratives, metaphysical predilections, the suggestion that one can through self-cultivation transcend one's own limitations, and the effort to extend the concept to "heaven and humanity combine into one." The section following deals with the growing criticisms of the proposal: it was a defensive and strategic move by non-mainland philosophers; the use of Western philosophical categories risked obscuring and even distorting the Confucian – and thus Chinese – tradition, which has no need for concepts such as transcendence; and the context of the "wild 90s," in which the proposal gained some traction on the mainland. The concluding section indicates briefly the direction of Chinese philosophical debates over the last decade or so in developing terms that arise from the Chinese tradition.

Since the 196os, there has been an ongoing debate in Chinese philosophy concerning the applicability of otherwise of the concept of immanent or "inner transcendence [内在超越 *neizaichaoyue*]." Drawing on Western philosophical frameworks, a number of non-mainland philosophers proposed in the 1960s and 1970s that Chinese culture and philosophy should be seen in terms of an ontological transcendence – embodied in terms such as "heaven [天 *tian*]" and the "way [道 *dao*]" – that is immanent in human and social life. This proposal found quite a number who sought to defend the concept of inner transcendence, along with those who tried to elaborate further features. For a time, "inner transcendence" became the assumed descriptor of Chinese philosophy, not

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merely in terms of Confucianism, but also including Daoism and sinified Buddhism. At the same time, there were also critics of the very possibility of using the oxymoron of "inner transcendence" to speak of Chinese philosophy. Over time, these voices became more numerous, especially among mainland philosophers. Alongside the criticisms, they also began to elaborate terms and concepts that arise from the Chinese tradition: "heaven and humanity combine as one [天人合一 *tianren heyi*]" was a beginning, but we also find substantive deliberations on "life-life [生生 *shengsheng*], "household [家 *jia*]," "intimacy [亲亲 *qinqin*]," and others.

The following study is structured as follows. I begin with the initial proposal of "inner transcendence," focusing on Mou Zongsan, who was based on Taiwan Island and later the British colony of Hong Kong before its long overdue return to the mainland in 1997. The next section deals with the various defences and elaborations of the proposal, especially in terms of historical narratives, metaphysical predilections, and the sense that one can through self-cultivation transcend one's own limitations. I also include here a discussion of the effort to extend the concept to "heaven and humanity combine into one," but note that this effort is already an implicit move beyond "inner transcendence." The third section concerns the mounting criticisms of the concept, before a concluding overview of developments in the deployment of genuinely Chinese philosophical terms over the last couple of decades.

Before proceeding, some terminological clarity is needed. At a linguistic level, the word in English and Western languages more generally derives from Latin "transcendere," meaning to surpass, cross over, and transgress boundaries. In Chinese, the character 越 *yue* has an overlapping semantic field, including getting past, jumping over, exceeding, overstepping, and going through. Many are the potential combinations with other characters, including 超越 *chaoyue*, which is usually translated as "transcend," but it should be noted that the term has positive and negative meanings, perhaps best captured in the differences between transcend and transgress. We need to be wary of leaping immediately from

linguistic terminology to philosophical terms,[2] for in Western philosophy "transcendence" refers to *ontological* transcendence. In other words, it concerns the order of being (ontological), and may include Plato's forms, Kant's efforts to distinguish between transcendent and transcendental, and the Western distinction between transcendence and immanence (even where a radical emphasis on the latter is found, this is done within the framework). Inescapably entwined with philosophy in Western contexts is the theological and metaphysical meaning. In this case, the realm of ontological transcendence turns on God and the empirically unknowable heaven. As the influential definition of Ames puts it,"strict philosophical or theological transcendence is to assert that an independent and superordinate principle A originates, determines, and sustains B, where the reverse is not the case."[3]

Inner Transcendence: The Proposal

The *locus classicus* for the concept of "inner transcendence" is the work of the philosopher, Mou Zongsan (1909-1995). A prolific writer, whose collected works fill 33 volumes, Mou summed up a key tenet of his effort to rework the Confucian tradition as follows:

> The Dao of heaven is high above, and has the meaning of transcendence. When the Dao of heaven is concentrated within a person, it is also inherent in human nature, and then the Dao

2 So Ren Jiantao, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence: Religious Faith, Moral Belief, and the Question of Order." *Social Sciences in China* 2012.7: 38. Unfortunately, this is precisely what Gao Wei does in his spirited defence of inner transcendence in Chinese philosophy; see Gao Wei, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence'." *Journal of Higher Education* 2021.4: 14–23. Citations follow the convention of Chinese names, with the family name first, followed by the personal name, without a comma between them.

3 Roger Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), 212. See also David Hall and Roger Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 13. Beyond my remit here is the age-old theological struggle between grace, as the necessary action of God in the world, and human works, operating on the assumption that the believer yearns for the other side and strives for heaven. Related is the tension between heaven "above" and heaven "on earth," although the latter category assumes that God enables such a process and the heaven realised on "earth" is the manifestation of the ontologically superior heaven "from above."

> of heaven is within [内在 *neizai*] (**immanent**). Therefore, we may use Kant's favoured words and say that the Dao of heaven is **transcendent** on the one hand and within [*neizai*] on the other (**immanent** and **transcendent** are opposites). The Dao of heaven is both transcendent and within [*neizai*], and this can be said to have both religious and moral significance: religion attaches importance to transcendence, while morality attaches importance to what is within [*neizai*].[4]

Allow me to exegete this frequently quoted text. To begin with, the reference to Kant is telling, as are the frequent uses of English philosophical terms. I have used bold type to indicate where Mou uses English terms in the quotation translated above. Mou was thoroughly versed in and indeed a proponent of Kantian philosophy in a Chinese context. Or rather, he argued that a reinvigorated Confucianism would be able to respond to and amend the defects in Kantian and Western philosophy more generally, and indeed provide a valuable resource for the West in its already obvious decline. Although he was adept at German (he translated some of Kant's works into Chinese), his published texts frequently use philosophical terminology from one of the cultural relics of the British Empire – English – to indicate the specific meaning of the Chinese terms used. Thus, in the text quoted above, 超越 *chaoyue* is identified in parentheses as "transcendent" and 内在 *neizai*, which I have rendered more literally as "within," is identified with "immanent."

Further, the emphasis is on drawing transcendence down into this immanent world. Mou suggests that the typical Western opposition between ontological transcendence and immanence is actually inherent in human nature. For Mou, this is not merely a core feature of Chinese (Confucian) philosophy, but a better proposition per se. The apparently mysterious "Dao of heaven" is thoroughly inner (内在 *neizai*) or immanent. To continue the spatial metaphor, Mou Zongsan also emphasised the need for Chinese philosophy and culture to rise up to a robust form of transcendence:

4 Mou Zongsan, *The Specific Quality of China's Philosophy* (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1997), 21. This work was originally published in 1963. All translations are by the author of this article.

> If China's cultural life, inherited and developed by Confucianism, is only the ethics and morality of this common (secular) world, without the dimension of transcendence, without the affirmation of a transcendent [超越 *chaoyue*] moral and spiritual entity, without the affirmation of the reality of divinity [神性 *shenxing*] and a source of value, then Confucianism does not become its cultural life, and the Chinese nation will not become a nation with a cultural life.[5]

For Mou, Chinese culture needs to overcome the perceived lack of transcendence, for without such transcendence cultural life has no meaning or purpose. The type of transcendence he has in mind is embodied above all in a "divinity [神性 *shenxing*]," from which moral value derives. Here Mou reveals that he adheres to a more esoteric Confucianism, seeking a "metaphysics of morals [道德的形而上学 *daode de xingershangxue*]."[6]

Finally, a word on Kant. Mou Zongsan develops and frames his proposal for inner transcendence by working through Kant's philosophy, specifically the "transcendental [先验的 *xianyande*]" as the internal structures of the mind that can be actualised in experience. There is no need here to go through the detailed steps by which he does so, except to point out that it is the "moral law within" that Mou sought to extract from Kant.[7] This immersion in one of the main figures of German idealism has not only made Mou's work more amenable to some English-language studies,[8] but it also indicates the problems of trying to articulate what became a modern phase of Neo-Confucianism – Mou is regarded as one the main founders of this phase – through and as a response to Western

5 Mou Zongsan, "Humanism and Religion." In Mou Zongsan, *The Knowledge of Life*, (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), 63-70, 63. The essay was initially published in 1955.

6 Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence' in Chinese Culture." *Journal of Higher Education* 2021.4: 18.

7 Xu Tao, "'Inner Transcendence' and the 'Unity of Heaven and Humanity' from the Perspectives of Chinese and Western Philosophy." *Academic Monthly* 2016.6: 167.

8 For example, Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Jason Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in the New Confucianism of Mou Zongsan* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

philosophical frameworks. I will return to these problems after dealing with the debates around the proposal of inner transcendence.

Defence and Elaboration

The texts from which I quoted above were initially published in 1963 and 1955, during Mou Zongsan's most productive and creative period while teaching in Hong Kong (then still an undemocratic colony of the faded British Empire). Mou has certainly had his defenders, not least because the divisive and outspoken Mou cultivated a number of disciples who had been his students. Their influence had the effect of rendering "inner transcendence" as an assumed category of Chinese philosophy.[9] But there were also critics, some explicit and some seeking to movie the scholarly discussion beyond the category of "inner transcendence." In this section, I deal with some of the main defensive moves, albeit more in terms of elaboration on other aspects: the development of grand historical narratives; the enhancement of the idealist and metaphysical bent of the proposal; the process of overcoming – and thus transcending – one's limitations through self-cultivation; and an emphasis on "heaven and humanity combine into one."

In terms of so-called historical narratives, the (US-based) Yu Yingshi located the origins of a commonly shared transcendence in the cultures that arose during the "Axial Age" of the first millennium BCE.[10] However, the paths taken in cultural developments since that time have been

9 Du Weiming, *Prospects for the Third Development Period of Confucianism* (Taibei: Lianjing Publishing Company, 1989), 340. Han Zhen, and Zhang Weiwe. *Contemporary Value Systems in China* (trans. Zhao Chaoyong. China Insights. Singapore: Springer, 2018), 14–15.

10 A precursor may be found with Qian Mu, who proposed that the nomadic and aggressively commercial culture of the West led to an extroverted "hostility between heaven and humanity," with strong oppositions between humanity and nature, subject and object, and transcendence and immanence. By contrast, agricultural societies have developed the "unity of heaven and humanity," with the integration of nature and humanity, inside and outside, and no distinction between subject and object. The result: "the supreme spirit of Western culture is the extroverted religious spirit, and the spirit of Chinese culture is the inner moral spirit." Qian Mu, "The Righteousness of the Study of Culture." In *Collected Works of Qian Mu*(Taibei: Lianjing Publishing Company, 1998, Vol. 37:1–228), 60. The book was originally published in 1952.

quite distinct. Western countries, for example, developed a stark "outer transcendence [外在超越 *waizaichaoyue*]," putting all of the emphasis on a philosophical first mover or God who determines the known world. By contrast, Chinese culture developed an "inner transcendence" and had no need for an organised system of religious institutions to make contact with the "City of God." Instead, while Chinese culture affirms a "transcendent source of value," it "does not make any special effort to construct another perfect metaphysical world to determine values, and then use this world to reflect and promote the actual human world."[11] Here we may detect a somewhat different sense of "transcendence" to the ontological version found in Western philosophy: the emphasis is on basic cultural principles rather than the philosophical-theological connotations of the term in the Western tradition.

At the same time, there was an emphasis – especially by those outside mainland China – that was distinctly metaphysical. Mou Zongsan attributed to the "Dao of heaven [天道 *tiandao*]" a quasi-religious status, while Du Weiming suggests that from its earliest days Confucianism has had profound religious connotations and significance in terms of an "ultimate concern."[12] Further, Tang Junyi's idealist tendencies emphasised the metaphysical dimension of "天 *tian*." Tang's *The Spiritual Value of Chinese Culture* deploys an initial historical move (see above), in the sense that all cultures have an original form of transcendence, but that the Chinese tradition led to the development of inner self-creation and transcendence. No matter how immanent it may be, inherent in human nature and life, for Tang the transcendent element of "天*tian*" was very much a metaphysical entity: this moral entity was seen to transcend all human society and the world we know, while at the same time infusing it all.[13]

11 Yu Yingshi, *Confucian Ethics and Business Spirit* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004), 8. See also, Yu Yingshi, *The Path of Inner Transcendence* (Beijing: China Radio Film and Television Press, 1992), 12. And Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence'," 16–18.

12 Du Weiming, *On the Religiosity of Confucianism – A Modern Interpretation of the "Doctrine of the Mean"* (trans. Duan Dezhi. Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 1999).

13 Tang Junyi, *The Spiritual Value of Chinese Culture* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Education Press,

There has also been an emphasis on self-cultivation so as to refine virtue and seek a more perfected life. While the nature and knowledge of life (生命 *shengming*) is seen as the distinguishing feature of Chinese philosophy,[14] this life is not a given: one must engage in "cultivating one's moral character [修身 *xiushen*]," "self cultivation [自我修**养** *ziwo xiuyang*]," and "learning for the sake of self-improvement [为己之学 *weijizhixue*]".[15] While the whole process may be immanent to relational human existence, the transcendent aspect is to overcome self-limitation so as achieve a more ideal state of existence.[16] Or, as Gao Wei puts it, with an emphasis on the educational nature of Chinese philosophy, "inner transcendence is the effort and aspiration to transcend the finitude of the present world and achieve spiritual freedom."[17] This may be called a transcendence out of and through immanence, but one wonders why the language of transcendence needs to be used at all. While the influence of Buddhism seems strong here, I remain puzzled as to why the concepts of self-cultivation and self-improvement are not more than adequate.

Finally, there was a move that can be seen as both an effort at elaboration and an effort to move towards terms from the Chinese philosophical tradition: "heaven and humanity combine into one [天人合一 *tianren heyi*]," often translated as the "unity of heaven and humanity." The connotations of this four-character saying are notable, such as "nature and humanity merge into one," or "humanity is an integral part of nature." Among the many scholars who emphasise this category, let me give

2006). Originally published in 1953.

14 Mou Zongsan, *The Knowledge of Life* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005). This work was originally published in 1970. Guo Xiaojun, "On the Ethical Spirit in Confucian Philosophy – From the Perspective of 'Internal Transcendence'." *Jiangsu Social Sciences* 2016.6: 31–33.

15 This four-character phrase is traced back to *The Analects*, where Confucius observes: "'In ancient times people learned for the sake of self-improvement [*gu zhi xuezhi wei ji*]; nowadays people learn for show." Confucius, *Lunyu jinyi – The Analects of Confucius (Chinese-English Bilingual Edition)* (trans. Yang Bojun, Wu Shuping, Pan Fu'en and Wen Shaoxia. Jinan: Qilu shushe chuban gongsi, 1993): 14.24.

16 Guo, "On the Ethical Spirit in Confucian Philosophy," 33.

17 Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence'," 21.

the example of the mainland philosopher, Tang Yijia (1927-2014), who sought to bring Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism – the three great traditions in China – into discussions over "inner transcendence."[18] However, for Tang Yijia "inner transcendence" was more of a convenient label. Even though he used such terminology, we can see in his work a greater effort to identify distinct Chinese philosophical terms. It is here that the "unity of heaven and humanity" comes into play. This unity determines two other categories: "thought and action combine into one" and "sentiment and scene combine into one."[19] These three concern the topics of truth (life), goodness (ethics), and beauty (aesthetics), and here we find the great emphasis on ethics and moral philosophy. It is for this reason, argued Tang, that scholars are socially engaged, with a strong sense of social responsibility and historical mission.

To sum up the argument thus far: we have seen how Mou Zongsan tried to find a philosophical footing for Chinese philosophy by using the Western-derived concept of "inner transcendence." Further, I examined a number of proposals that sought to develop what for many became an assumed position, specifically in terms of: a historical narrative with common origins in transcendence and divergent paths over the millennia; metaphysical predilections by some non-mainland philosophers; an effort to emphasise the transcending of one's own limitations for the sake of a better life; and the effort to connect inner transcendence with "heaven and humanity combine into one."

18 Tang Yijia, *Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and the Problem of Inner Transcendence* (Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Press, 1991).

19 Tang Yijia, "On the Problem of the Category System of Traditional Chinese Philosophy." *Social Sciences in China* 1981.5: 157–72. See also Gan Chunsong: "the unity of heaven and man is the schema of traditional Chinese thought, with which are built the Chinese views of the universe and values. In spite of that, the unity of heaven and man or harmony of heaven and man is not an endeavor to construct a form of thought in order to dissolve contradictions, but conversely, is an effort aimed at revealing the tension resulting from balancing the conflict and equilibrium between heaven and man." Gan Chunsong. *A Concise Reader of Chinese Culture* (trans. Yu Shiyi. China Insights. Singapore: Springer, 2019), 162.

Criticisms

Despite the apparent consensus for a time that "inner transcendence" functioned as a shorthand for Chinese philosophy, questions have been raised over the years concerning the proposal. These criticisms include: the logical inconsistency, and even oxymoron, in the proposal itself; the misunderstanding of Kant's "transcendental" in Mou Zongsan's work; the misreading of Confucian thought; the strategically defensive move of the initial proposal, with the need to find a way to defend Chinese philosophy in Western terms; and the fact that Western philosophical frameworks of transcendent-immanent are neither applicable nor useful for understanding Confucian and Chinese philosophy.[20] I will pick up some of these and introduce further factors.

The first is a contextual question. Many of the major proponents of what became known as modern Neo-Confucianism were non-mainland scholars. As young scholars or even students, they fled with the Goumindang (National Party) forces under Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-Shek) to the island of Taiwan, or to the British colony of Hong Kong: Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Fang Dongmei, Yu Yingshi, and Du Weiming – the latter two moving on to spend their working lives in the USA. Further, there is very little engagement with Marxist philosophy in their work. Indeed, some went so far as to suggest that the Confucian philosophical tradition was diverted with the Manzu (Manchu) – and thus non-Han – Qing Dynasty, and deviated even further with the founding of the New China in 1949.[21]

20 Zheng Jiadong. "'Transcendence' and 'Inner Transcendence' – Mou Zongsan and Kant." *Social Sciences in China* 2001.4: 43-53. Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence." Shen Shunfu, "Existence and Transcendence: On the Basic Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy." *Academics* 2015.1: 156–58. Xu, "'Inner Transcendence' and the 'Unity of Heaven and Humanity'," 168. Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence'," 17–18.

21 Mou Zongsan was perhaps the most extreme example: a vociferous anti-communist and Han nationalist, he saw his work as opening a third phase of Confucian flourishing. The first was from the time of Confucius to the Han Dynasty, the second was the Neo-Confucianism (in response to Buddhism) of the Song and Ming Dynasties, and third began in the second half of the twentieth century.

The second point of criticism sees the proposal of "inner transcendence" as both defensive and strategic. Let me put it this way: as China began to emerge from the century of humiliation, from the First Opium War of 1840 to 1949, philosophers – among many others – were seeking ways to rejuvenate Chinese philosophy and culture. While mainland philosophy took the path of dialectical and historical materialism (Marxist philosophy), this would not really begin to bear fruit until the reform and opening-up that began in 1978. By contrast, the non-mainland philosophers turned primarily towards the Confucian tradition. In doing so, they temporarily took the lead in Chinese philosophy.

Crucially, they did so by deploying Western philosophy, by which they meant German idealism. They all studied this material in depth, especially Kant, Schelling, and Hegel. Confucian philosophy was reframed in these terms. Why? As Ren Jiantou has argued,[22] this was a defensive move. Having been under attack from Western philosophers at least since Hegel, with many opining that China does not have "philosophy," and feeling under even more pressure in the 1940s and 1950s due to Western "culture shock,"[23] these non-mainland philosophers turned to German idealism. The purpose: to show not only that Chinese philosophy is indeed a form of philosophy, but even more that it is able to solve intractable problems in Western philosophy itself and perhaps even "save" it.[24] A core concept was that of "inner transcendence." For Ren Jiantao, the cost was too high: by entering the discourse of Western philosophy, and especially its entwinement with theology, these Neo-Confucians ended up distorting Chinese culture and philosophy.

> This type of defence was undertaken under the comprehensive pressure of Christianity or Western culture, which inevitably

22 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence."

23 I would add that the proposal of "inner transcendence" should not be seen merely as a response to Western philosophical and culture pressure. It was also a response to the establishment of the New China in 1949, and then the tumultuous decade of 1966-1976 ("Cultural Revolution"), when all that was Confucian was condemned. The burden of "saving" Confucius was perceived to fall on the shoulders of the non-mainland philosophers.

24 Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence," 20–21.

> meant a strategic analytic choice so as to avoid the pressure of cultural comparison. When this strategic choice occupies the core position in analysing the specific value of Confucianism or of Chinese culture, the distinct value Confucianism or Chinese culture may appear to be obscured.[25]

Or, as he puts it more strongly later in the same study, the very concept of "inner transcendence" ends up distorting Confucianism.[26] At the time of writing, Ren's long and influential study marked an early step in the move away from deploying Western philosophical terms and seeking terms that arise from the Chinese tradition itself.

All of this brings us to the third problem: using Western philosophical concepts such as transcendence and immanence for Confucian, and indeed Chinese, philosophy. As we have seen, Ren Jiantao argued that the use of such terms obscures and distorts Confucian thought. He goes on to observe: "Confucianism seeks neither transcendence in the (Western) philosophical sense nor transcendence in the (Christian) religious sense."[27] In its interconnected realms of individual disposition and socio-political concerns, Confucianism was and is concerned with the moral nature of human beings and their self-cultivation. The pursuit of virtue in this framework has no need of transcendence. For Shen Shunfu, early Chinese philosophy was not framed in terms of transcendence and immanence. While there may have been some strands that tended in this direction during the Neo-Confucian thought of the Song and Ming dynasties, even this was criticised at the time. For Shen, "immanent transcendence" is an absurd way of speaking about Confucianism: "It is unscientific to simply say that Chinese philosophy has immanence, transcendence or inner transcendence."[28] Further, Roger Ames has for many years agreed, pointing out that this should not be seen as a lack; rather, Confucianism

25 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence," 31.

26 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence," 42.

27 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence," 39.

28 Shen, "Existence and Transcendence," 159.

simply does not *need* a transcendent entity.[29] The reason is that a plethora of problematic oppositions flow from this Western position: subject-object, agent-action, mind-body, nature-nurture, and so on. For what Ames calls the "relationally constituted person," this conception of person does not appeal to "superordinate, substantive categories such as 'soul', 'self', 'will', 'faculties', 'nature', 'mind', 'character', and so on." Instead, such a person is embodied within the "social activity of thinking and feeling within the manifold of relations that constitutes family, community, and the natural environment … a configuration of concrete, dynamic, and constitutive relations rather than an individuated substance defined by some subsisting agency."[30]

Criticisms have also been directed at the metaphysical and quasi-religious tendencies of some of the modern Neo-Confucians, such as Mou Zongsan, Du Weiming, and Tang Junyi. In response, scholars point to an early de-metaphysicalising move in Confucian thought. Confucius famously observed: "To devote oneself to the people's just cause, and, while respecting spiritual beings [鬼神 *guishen*], to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."[31] The spirits and gods – the fuller meaning of 鬼神 *guishen* – should be kept "at a distance [远 *yuan*]," so as to focus on human relations. As Mou Zhongjian puts it, Confucius put "heaven" aside and was concerned with "benevolence [仁 *ren*]" – better translated as "two-person mindedness"[32] – so as to identify the source of virtue. Thus, "Confucius transferred the value source of social morality and ethics into people's hearts by promoting benevolence through rites, and turned the heteronomous focus of religious rites into autonomous self-discipline."[33]

29 Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 212. This position by Ames is misinterpreted by Gao Wei as in some way a lack or deficiency. Gao, "On the Contemporary Educational Value of 'Inner Transcendence'," 14–15.

30 Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*, 213.

31 Confucius, *Lunyu jinyi – The Analects of Confucius*, 6:22.

32 Sun Pinghua, *Human Rights Protection System in China* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), 4–5.

33 Mou Zhongjian and Zhang Jian. *A General History of Chinese Religion* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2000), 172.

However, as Xu Tao argues, this de-metaphysicalising move actually began earlier: during the early days of the Zhou Dynasty in the 11th century BCE, what Xu calls a depersonalising of "heaven [天 *tian*]" had already begun.[34] Or, as Ren Jiantao puts it, Chinese culture from its earliest moments experienced a profound enlightenment concerning the "heavenly way [天道 *tiandao*]," focusing on human affairs and thus cutting off the path of shaping the spirit of Chinese culture in terms of religion.[35] So we find that over time heaven came to be seen more in terms of a general principle and moral entity, with the latter embodied within human nature. While Daoism was concerned more with the principle or root of the world, Confucianism saw heaven as a model of social order focused on morality and ethics: both the inner moral statutes (仁 *ren*, or "two-person mindedness") and outer social order (礼 *li*, "ritual") are intimately connected. Through the mutual interaction of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, heaven as principle and as a moral entity were eventually fused into one.[36]

What, then, are we to make of the idea that the moral cultivation of Confucianism seeks to break through one's self-limitations so as to produce a more virtuous person and society? As we saw earlier, Guo Xiaojun and Gao Wei have argued in this vein. Here Ren Jiantao provides a succinct answer concerning the relation between present reality and the

34 Xu, "'Inner Transcendence' and the 'Unity of Heaven and Humanity'," 169. See also Mou and Zhang, *Zhongguo zongjiao tongshi,* 78. In a little more detail: while one finds references in the earliest layers of the *Book of Songs* to a "God on High [上帝 *shangdi*]" – taken over from the earlier Shang dynasty – these began to fade already with the Duke of Zhou, who stressed a shift from the ignorance and superstition of the earlier ideas inherited from the Shang to a focus on "valuing and emphasising human affairs." See Gu Kansheng and Yu Degang, "On Zhou Gong's Philosophy of the 'Mandate of Heaven' and its Influence on Later Generations." *Journal of Sichuan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 2014.1: 43–50. The Duke of Zhou (周公 *Zhougong)* was held up by Confucius as the ideal public servant: the duke carried out his duties in an exemplary manner until the underage regent and his nephew, King Cheng, could assume the throne, and at that moment the duke stepped back from his role as regent.

35 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence," 45.

36 One may ask whether a moral principle is some form of transcendence, since this seems to have been the assumption of at least Yu Yingshi. However, as noted earlier, this is by no means necessary, since even the notion of a transcendent principle faces the problems of the transcendent-immanent structure.

pursuit of ideals: "the fundamental way for Confucianism to resolve this confrontation is immediate, temporal, direct, and internal, but it does not seek philosophical or religious 'transcendent' goals." A pertinent example: the purpose of "looking up at the heavenly bodies" is to "look down and investigate the features of the human world" so as to "know the reasons for darkness and light."[37] In other words, there is no worship of heavenly bodies or transcendent ideals, but simply concerns with improvements in the known world of human existence.

Finally, what are we to make of the fact that "inner transcendence" became an assumed position among many, even on the mainland?[38] A major reason concerns what may be called the "wild 90s." This was a time when the contradictions of the reform and opening-up began to become apparent. At an economic level, there was a growing gap between rich and poor (people as well as regions), conditions for workers deteriorated, environmental pollution became apparent, the gap between city and countryside widened, and the CPC lost contact with the masses, as revealed in deep corruption, lack of knowledge of Marxism even among leading cadres, and loss of trust and confidence in the CPC.[39] During this time, it was felt that the moral compass was awry and all manner of proposals were put forward. A leading proposal came from non-mainland Neo-Confucians, who seemed to provide a way for China to regain its footing through its own tradition. Much has, of course, changed since that time: the new era that began in 2012 has addressed many of these aforementioned problems and there is much greater clarity concerning the direction in which China is headed, and with that clarity has come significance confidence and trust. Concurrently, the criticisms of "inner transcendence" began to mount and new proposals arose concerning what are regarded as more appropriate terms from the Chinese tradition.

37 Ren, "Inner Transcendence and Outer Transcendence," 40.

38 Han and Zhang, *Contemporary Value Systems*, 14–15.

39 Zan Jiansen, "The Basic Social Contradiction and Comprehensively Deepening Reform." *Theoretical Exploration* 2015.4: 42–45, 43.

Conclusion: From "Inner Transcendence" to "Shengsheng"

As we have seen, the criticisms have certainly grown over the years, although the concept still has its defenders. I have emphasised the more substantial criticisms: the proposal by non-mainland philosophers turned out to be defensive and strategic, but it fell into the trap of deploying Western philosophical categories in order to defend the philosophical credentials of Chinese philosophy. The problem here is that such categories risk obscuring and distorting the Confucian – and thus Chinese – philosophical legacy, which simply has no need of categories such as transcendence and immanence. The metaphysical and even quasi-religious tendencies of the some of the proponents certainly did not help their cause. I also suggested that the idea did have some traction on the mainland in the context of theoretical and cultural disarray of the "wild 90s," with some spillover into the first decade of the next century, although I also pointed out this period is by now well in the past.

Looking back over this material concerning "inner transcendence," we can say that it has turned out to be a good example of what is known as "以西解中 *yixi-jiezhong*," using Western categories in an attempt to understand China.[40] But a question remains: what categories are appropriate for understanding Chinese philosophy today? In this conclusion, I can only indicate these themes, for they require a full independent study (in many respects, the present study is a necessary precursor to such research).

In the last decade or so, there has been significant deliberation on the concept of 生生 *shengsheng*, which literally means "life-life" or "birth-birth," and can perhaps be translated as "regeneration."[41] In contrast to Western philosophical discourse and its concern with individual "being," the repeat of the character 生 *sheng* indicates the basic reality of

40 Wang Haifeng, "The Realistic Character of Marxist Philosophy in Contemporary China – Reflections on Marxist Philosophical Research in the Past 40 Years of the Reform and Opening-Up." *Philosophical Trends* 2018.10: 26.

41 At times, we find the fuller 生生不息 *shengsheng buxi*, continuous regeneration.

relatedness. Let me put it this way: what is the origin of humanity? A man and woman meet and a child results. There is no isolated and aggressive individual here, but a relational order of difference.[42] From this core category, a number of others flow, such as 家 *jia* or "home" and "household," 亲亲 *qinqin* or "intimacy," and 尊尊 *zunzun* or "respect."[43] While the semantic field of each term is rich indeed, note again the paired characters, speaking of human interconnection and the integrated relationality of differential existence. Much of the material published in the last decade on these questions concerns how the ancient Confucian categories can be transformed in light of the rapid process of Chinese modernisation, and of course how they can be understood in light of the collective emphasis of sinified Marxist philosophy (which by now cannot be separated from Chinese philosophy but is an integral to philosophy on the mainland). Given that I am merely indicating the contours of a rich discussion in Chinese philosophy, I will not say more here, save to invoke once again the core Confucian category of 仁 *ren*. Earlier, I mentioned that although the term is usually translated as "benevolence," the more literal translation as "two-person mindedness" indicates more clearly its emphasis: 人 *ren as* "person," and 二 *er* as "two."[44]

42 Sun Xiangchen, "Being Unto Death and Continuous Regeneration – The Structure of Existence in Traditional Chinese Culture." *Religion and Philosophy* 2014.3: 223–35. Sun Xiangchen, "Regeneration: Existence in the Context of Generations." *Philosophical Research* 2018.9: 113–25. Shen, "Existence and Transcendence," 152–54. Zhao Tingyang. *The Making and Becoming of China: Its Way of Historicity* (Beijing: China Citic Press, 2016), 100. Yao Zhongqiu. "The Relationality of the Theory of Regeneration: Constructing a Common Theoretical Foundation for the Social Sciences." *Journal of Renmin University of China* 2021.5: 147–58.

43 Sun Xiangchen, *On Home: Individual and Intimacy* (Shanghai: Huadong Normal University Press, 2019). Sun Xiangchen "Home: Chinese Culture's Closest Contemporary Form." *Journal of the Central Institute of Socialism* 2020.5: 116–23. Yao, "The Relationality of the Theory of Regeneration," 152–57.

44 This is by no means my own suggestion, for it comes from Zhang Pengchun (also known as P. C. Chang), who was China's representative on and indeed vice-chair of the UN's Human Rights Commission as it worked on what became the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Playing a core role in seeking common ground among many different cultures and their representatives, Zhang persuaded the drafting committee to include "conscience" along with reason in the first article of the declaration. "Conscience" is here a translation of 仁 *ren*. Sun Pinghua, *Historic Achievement of a Common Standard: Pengchun Chang and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Singapore: Springer, 2018).

The connection with the other terms mentioned in this concluding paragraph should be obvious.

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Anthropodicies of Coloniality: Urbanocene, Plantationcene and Critical Theory[1]

Eduardo Mendieta[2]

Abstract: This article argues that we think of the Anthropocene as a form of anthropodicy, for in some readings this new geological age of the earth can be understood as a judgment of the human species *tout court*. Then, it sets to investigate the ways in which different "Critical Theorists" in the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory have taken up the question of race and racism, which have been entangled and complicit with the European colonization project and imperial impositions. It is argued that Angela Y. Davis, who was a student of Adorno and Oskar Negt in Frankfurt, should be given particular attention, because of her analysis of "prison industrial complex" and her relation to Hegelian dialectics. In order to make this more legible, it is argued that we ought to think of the Anthropocene as made up of the Urbanocene, the mega-urbanization of humanity, and the impact that the platation system, and slavery, had in the emergence of capitalism. We can not understand the rise of the mega-urbanization of humanity without considering the way in which slavery and its institutions have configured urban spaces across the world. The basic argument is: The Plantationcene is the Urbanocene face of the Capitalocene, which is its necropolitical face and its geologies of racism and slavery.

1 I want to express my gratitude to the directors of the long running colloquium on "Philosophy and Social Science" that has been held in Prague, the Czech Republic, since 1993, for their invitation to deliver a keynote address at the symposium in 2019, which led to the writing of this essay. I also want to give special thanks to Amy Allen, Robert Bernasconi, Matthias Fritsch, Max Pensky, and Nancy Tuana, with whom I have discussed many of the ideas in this paper.

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I. Introduction

In 1710 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz published his only book, the *Theodicy*, with which he introduced a new term into our language thus giving a name to a very old problem[3]. The problem is that of God's justice and goodness, or more precisely, if God is a supremely beneficent and omnipotent being why does God allow evil, injustice and inequity? Like Augustine, Leibniz affirms that the source of evil in the world is humanity's supreme divine gift, our freedom. In contrast to Augustine, however, Leibniz introduced something new in the philosophical-theological corpus of the West. What was new in Leibniz's new science of God's justice was the conception that God was a supremely perfect being that could not but be rational and that thus this, of all the possible worlds, could not but be the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz was a divinely inspired optimist. Little did he know that the next couple of centuries would see some of the greatest horrors in the history of humanity, among them, already taking place during his time: the genocide of indigenous populations in the Americas, and the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas of millions of Africans shackled and stuffed into slave ships. Such horrors would increase in crescendo culminating in the Twentieth Century with two world wars and the holocaust, the nadir of humanity. The question of theodicy is really the question of anthropodicy, that is, of the goodness and justice of humanity.

In 2002, geologist and climotologist Paul Crutzen in a paper published in *Nature* introduced the term "Anthropocene," arguing that this name should be adopted by geologists to designate a new period in the geological history of the planet[4]. Crutzen listed a series of factors that have transformed the planet *en toto*: the salination of the seas, the unprece-

3 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the goodness of God, the freedom of man, and the origin of evil*, edited with an introduction by Austin Farrer, translated by E.M. Huggard (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1952)

4 Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind" *Nature*, 415, 23 (2002): https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a. See also Jos Lelieveld, "Paul J. Crutzen (1933-2021)" *Nature*, 591, 29 (2021): https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00479-0

dented CO2 and methane levels in the atmosphere, and the utilization by humans of more than ¾ of the surface of the planet. Nature, so to say, was no longer Nature, but rather the product of anthropogenetic factors that have given the earth a new metabolism: the earth was chocking, poisoning, and running out of space for all forms of living entities. In his short essay Crutzen points the finger at the rapid industrialization of the West and in particular at the Big Acceleration that took place in the United States, and then the West after WWII. Since then an entire library of books has been published that attempt to make sense of what the Anthropocene is or might be. A new lexicon has thus emerged that aims at offering either supporting or counter evidence for the phenomena that Crutzen correctly identified, for instance: thermocene, thanatocene, phagocene, phronocene, agnotecene, capitalocene, and Anglocene. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz in their 2016 book *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, coin, most interestingly, "polemocene," as a way to unpack the contested and contestable meanings of Anthropocene, and by doing so they aim to challenge the univocity and homogenizing consequences of either the effects or the agent of the so-called Anthropocene[5] . We should not fail to mention "Anthrobscene"[6], "Necrocene"[7], "Eurocene" and "Technocene."[8] Regardless of which terms we adopt or are inclined to use to modify the Anthropocene, the term has an oxymoronic character. On the one hand, it seems to elevate humanity to the heights of a God. Notably, Crutzen's 2002 article was titled "The Geology of Humanity." Humans are a geological force that seems to surpass the very powers of the earth. Our effects on the planet are so devastating that the extinctions unleashed during the An-

5 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), see also Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, "The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative" *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2014), 62-69.

6 Jussi Parikka, *The Anthrobscene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

7 Justin McBrien, "Accumulation Extinction. Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene," in Moore, Jason W. ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, Ca: PM Press, 2016) 116-137.

8 Peter Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 3.

thropocene, in particular in the last 50 years, are so extensive and deep that we are catalyzing a "Sixth Extinction."[9] On the other hand, the term also registers a species judgment: We are the worst thing to have happened to the planet and in that sense it names us as malady, a curse, a sickness of the planet. If things continue as they are going, we will turn ourselves into another layer in the geological record: humanity as geology.

At the center of the debate concerning what to call this new geological period is its periodicization, that is, when did the "Anthropocene" begin. As some of the alternative terms indicate, there are several candidates: the discovery of the new world, the industrial revolution, the great acceleration and the explosion of several atomic bombs in the late fifties and early sixties. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, have offered what I think is a very persuasive way to periodicize the Anthropocene, which furthermore is backed by distinct stratigraphic markers[10]. Lewis and Maslin proposed not only two new geological markers, but also give strong arguments for what they call the "Orbis hypothesis." This is an extremely momentous, but also efficacious and astute hypotheses. It basically argues, with strong evidence in its favor, that something radical happened not only in human history when the so-called "new world" was "invented," but also something decisive happened to the earth itself. The core of the "Orbis hypothesis" is that what happened when the Americas were integrated into the "Columbian Exchange" was the release of a series of geological waves that have crashed into the Anthropocene. This "exchanges" were not only of humans: slaves, indentured servants, exiles, pirates, exile populations, expelled excess populations, population transfers, but also massive and not yet even properly assessed exchanged of biota: animals, viruses, plants, invasive species, and above all, what that encounter unleashed, i.e. new regimes of life. How-

9 Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Six Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014)

10 Simon Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene" *Nature*, Vol. 519 (March 2015), 171-180.

ever, what is important about Lewis and Maslin's "Orbis hypothesis" is that "post-1492-humans on the two hemispheres were connected, trade became global, and some prominent social scientist refer to this time as the beginning of the modern 'world-system'[11]. This encounter is marked by the depopulation of indigenous peoples, from an estimated 54 million to 6 million by 1650 due to war, slavery, famine, and exposure to the diseases carried by Europeans. This depopulation, then, was followed by the re-peopling of the New World, with Europeans and enslaved Africans. This led, notably, to the re-foresting of the New World by some 50 million hectares of land, leading to a spike in the oxigenation of the atmosphere. Over all, 1492 opened the way to the unprecedented homogenization of the planet's biota, a process that continues unabated to this day. What Lewis and Maslin's "Orbis hypothesis" allows us to foreground is that the Anthropocene is intricately entwined with conquest, colonialism, slavery, imperialism, and war—all indispensable conditions of possibility for the rise of Western lead capitalism. The Anthropocene thus names a distinct experience of humanity and the planet that has to do with European domination of the planet.

Interestingly, over the same period that the Anthropocene surfaced as a term of contention, the "coloniality of power," was introduced into our vocabulary by Anibal Quijano to then be taken up a series of Latinx and Latin American thinkers to discuss and name the socio-historical underside of the Anthropocene: from Dussel, and Mignolo, to Maldonado-Torres and Lugones, a new type of scholarship has taken shape that focuses on the "social fact" of colonality[12]. This term names what Quijano calls a "matrix of intelligibility" that configures peoples and continents along the axes of: race, class, and rationality in such a way that some are derogated to the status of exploitable and expendable life, and others elevated to the status of lords and masters of those deemed inferior[13]. This matrix

11 Ibid, 175.

12 See my essay "Critique of Decolonial Reason: On the Philosophy of the Calibans" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2020), 127-154. See also Walter D. Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021)

13 See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21,

of intelligibility and its attendant forms of power, control, domination, were configured and installed with the metonymic 1492. We lived in the shadow of the Columbian Exchange, or rather in the shadow of the cataclysm that 1492 unleashed.

Both the Anthropocene and the "coloniality of power" converge in pronouncing a verdict: The West, Europe, and more specifically, Spain, Portugal, England, France and Germany are culpable for installing an epistemology and social ontology that led to the commodification of all life and the subordination of nature to the instrumental and exploitation aims of capitalism. Crucial, however, to the critique of Western hegemony and exploitation of the planet that the critique of the coloniality of power pronounces, is the critique of both "White Racial Supremacy" and "the Coloniality of Gender" that are entangled to assure the continued Western domination of the earth[14].

In what follows I am concerned with whether Critical Theory can meet the challenges that both the Anthropocene and the critique of the coloniality of power entail. Both terms, however, pivot on the questions of White Racial Supremacy, the Colonality of Gender, and the colonial matrix of intelligibility. I will focus on White Racial Supremacy and what kind of theoretical and philosophical resources Frankfurt School inflected Critical Theory may bring to the table.

II. Toward an Anthropocenic Critical Philosophy of Race

In "Criticizing Critical Theory" Charles Mills –published in a wonderful anthology edited by Penelope Deutsch and Cristina Lafont, titled *Critical Theory in Critical Times*[15]—offers a very critical perspective on the glairing

Nos 2-3 (March-Mary 2007), 168-178. See also the forthcoming Anibal Quijano, *Foundational Texts on Coloniality and Decoloniality*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo, Rita L. Segato, and Catherine E. Walsh (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming), which contains an extensive list of Quijano's numerous essays, texts, and interviews.

14 See my essay "Toward a Decolonial Feminist Imaginary: Decolonizing Futurity" in *Critical Philosophy of Race*, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-2 (2020): 237-64.

15 Penelope Deutsch and Cristina Lafont, eds. *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political & Economic Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 233-250.

failures and loud silences of critical theory with respect to the challenges of the endemic and constitutive racism of the West, in general, and U.S. society in particular. Relying on Amy Allen's critique of Critical Theory's Eurocentrism and his own extensive work on the racialist and racist dimension of Western and Euro-American political philosophy, Mills calls for a "decolonization" and "deracialization" of Critical Theory. Mills remarks on the paucity of work on the critique of racism and white supremacy within Critical Theory. In fact, he quotes Edward Said's indictment: "Frankfurt School critical theory, despite its seminal insights into the relationship between domination, modern society, and he opportunities for redemption through art as critique, is *stunningly* silent on racist theory, anti-imperialist resistance, and oppositional practice in the empire."[16] Mills goes on to discuss Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr.'s pioneering essay "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'" from 1990, which was published in the anthology *The Anatomy of Racism*, edited by David Theo Goldberg, as a way to underscore the point that Outlaw's call was not heard[17].

At this point I want to interject a friendly note of protest against Mills's characterization of the paucity of resources within critical theory as regards the question of the critique of white supremacy. Before Outlaw, we already had the pioneering work of Cornel West on what he presciently called "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," which is the title of chapter two of his 1982 book *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*[18]. This book relies on the philosophical resources that Critical Theorist's also rely on, and furthermore, it lays out "four" Afro-American traditions of critique to white supremacy in the U.S. It is a great shame that West's philosophical theological work is not taken seriously by most of Critical Theorists, and this is a shame because West after all identifies himself a socialist. What is certainly a major oversight

16 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 278. Emphasis added.

17 Lucius Outlaw, "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'" in David Theo Goldberg, ed. *The Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 58-82.

18 Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 40th Anniversary Expanded Edition, edited with a foreword by Jonathan Lee Walton (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 33-52.

on Mills's account and I would claim, among most Critical Theorists, is the failure to engage Angela Y. Davis' work, which as I have been arguing now for nearly two decades ought to be counted among the corpus of Critical Theorists[19]. Davis studied with Herbert Marcuse, first at Brandeis, and then UC-LA[20]. It was at his urging that she spent two years in Germany during the late sixties. She attended Adorno's lectures (most likely the lecture courses on *Negative Dialectics* and likely *Introduction to Sociology*, some of the last courses he gave before his death) and in fact met with him during his office hours a couple of times to discuss her activism and work on behalf of African American in the US –as she relayed to me in several of our conversations. Davis, however, gravitated towards Oskar Negt, who at the time was Habermas' assistant, because of his unapologetic commitment to the student and worker's movements in the late seventies. While Davis is known mostly, if not primarily, as one of the most important African-American feminists, she is also a pioneer in the study of hyper penality and the U.S. prison-industrial complex whose work was influence by Hegel and Marx[21]. I have devoted several essays to linking her work with the work of first generation critical theorists Otto Kircheimer and Georg Rusche, whose 1939 *Punishment and Social Structure* inaugurated the study of penality as a dimension of social critique[22].

I would be remised if I did not also mentioned Robert Gooding-Williams, who like Davis and West, draws on the same philosophical re-

19 See for instance my essays: "The Prison Contract and Surplus Punishment: On Angela Y. Davis' Abolitionism" *Human Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2007): 291-309, and "Prisons, Torture, Race: On Angela Y. Davis's Abolitionism" in *Philosophy Today*, Supplement 2006, 77-82, as well as my introduction: "De la prisión de la esclavitud a la esclavitud de la prisión. El abolicionismo de Angela Y. Davis" in Angela Y. Davis, *Democracia de la abolición. Prisiones, racismo y violencia*, edited and introduced by Eduardo Mendieta (Madrid: Trotta, 2016), 9-23.

20 See Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (Chicago, Il: Haymarket Books, 2021 (1974)

21 See in particular Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, A New Critical Edition by Angela Y. Davis including her "Lectures on Liberation" (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009)

22 Otto Kircheimer and Georg Rusche, *Punishment and Social Structure*, with a foreword by Thorsten Sellin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939)

sources that Frankfurt School Critical Theorist draw on. Gooding-Williams, unlike Outlaw, however, engaged in cultural critique à la Adorno and Marcuse, and must be kept in mind when thinking on the kind of archive and library that we ought to be accessing when trying to develop a critically inflected anthropocenic and decolonial critical philosophy of race. I deliberately left Gooding-Williams for last as he was Tom McCarthy's colleague at Northwestern before he left for Columbia University. In his John Dewey lecture, delivered in 2014, Tom McCarthy acknowledged the personal and intellectual impact that Gooding-Williams had on his work, in particular his last book, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development* which does take up critiques of racism and above all lays out some ways to use some elements in Habermas' work to deal with the enduring racism of U.S. society[23]. In particular McCarthy uses Adorno and Habermas's notions of coming to terms with the past and working on the past, to argue for reparations as a way to come to terms with the inheritances of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation and mass incarceration[24].

Let me return to Lucius Outlaw's essay from 1990, which incidentally is not a blanket condemnation of Frankfurt School inspired Critical Theory, as one may infer from Mills' characterization of the essay. Outlaw's essay takes aim at the Marxist inspired analysis that subordinates race to class and leaves problems of racism and white supremacy to whiter away once state power has been taken by the working class. In contrast, Outlaw identifies Marcuse's work as a promising socio-cultural analytics of desire, utopia and dreams of emancipation as key resources for thinking through the resilience of racism. And, most tellingly, Outlaw looks to Habermas' work as another key resource for confronting racism, most specifically Habermas' ideas about social evolution and societal learning. Outlaw, relying on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's work, argues for the historicization of race by demystifying its scientifically

23 Thomas McCarthy, "Philosophy in the Stream of Life" Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, Vol. 89 (ov. 2015), pp. 117-137.

24 Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), see in particular chapter 4: "Coming to Terms with the Past: On the politics of the memory of slavery," 96-128.

reified character and the understanding of race and racialism as "social formations" that cannot be reduced solely to "class interests," but that must also be seeing as psycho-social-cultural formations that condition our racial imaginaries[25]. Above all, however, such critique should aim at a process of social learning that can bring about social evolution.

In a recent essay by Peter E. Gordon, titled "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump" published in the indispensable *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, with essays by Wendy Brown and Max Pensky (2018), Gordon argues for the continuing and now ever more important relevance of the analysis undertaken in his 1949 study that links racism to the authoritarian personality[26]. Trumpism is not simply a phenomenon of neoliberalism and right wing politics, but a toxic combination of white supremacy, nativism, machismo, xenophobia and jingoism that calls for a critique that combines the critique of racism with critiques of sexism and what Adorno et. al. called the authoritarian personality.

Thus far I have discussed Mills, Outlaw, West, Davis, Gooding-Williams, and Gordon as a way to identify and foreground the resources that are both dormant and yet evident within Critical Theory to face the challenges of Anthropocenic White Racial Supremacy, and what following George Lipstiz I would call the Eurocentric Investment in White Racial Supremacy[27]. I have so far either implicitly or explicitly identified four key rubrics under which those critical resources would fall: the critique of scientism, studies in the authoritarian personality, *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung*, or working on the past, and critical penal studies. Evidently, these four rubrics allow us to span several generations of the tradition: from Adorno to Habermas, Honneth, to Benhabib, Fraser, McCarthy, Forst, and Allen, taking up Davis, Outlaw, West, and Mills. Using the resources

25 Michael Omi and Howard Winnant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2015)

26 Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky, *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 45-84.

27 George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People profit from Identity Politics*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018)

under these four rubrics that link several generations of Critical Theorist allows us to lay out the foundations of a Frankfurt School Style Critical Theory of Race for the Anthropocene, which at the same time takes seriously the call for decolonizing and deracializing Critical Theory.

III. The Urbanocene as a Plantationcene: The Racial Formations of the Anthropocene.

I want to turn now to an analysis of the Anthropocene through the lens of two new related concepts: the Urbanocence, which refers to the mega-urban character of world society and the Plantationcene, which refers to the enduring inheritances of Western coloniality. The key claim I make in this section is that if we are going to properly understand the challenges of the Anthropocence, from the underside of Western colonial white supremacy, then we have to attend to the ways in which the Urbanocene is hobbled by the Plantationcene[28].

The diversifying discourses on the Anthropocene, as witnessed by its polysemy, seem to have narrowed our horizons of understanding, while rolling back gained analytical and historical ground. It should be asked, in what ways do the discourses of the Anthropocene either follow or break from the important discourses, research and social-political agendas of the movements for environmental justice, which emerged with the critiques of environmental racism? If we can ask, as Dipesh Chakrabarty does, what is the climate of history?[29] we can ask: what is the climate of race in the Anthropocene? Or more specifically, to paraphrase Keucheyan, what is the color of climate in the Anthropocene?[30] More pointedly, do discourses on the Anthropocene occlude the advances that have been made in both un-

28 For the following I am relying on some ideas I developed more extensively in my essay: "Edge City: Reflections on the Urbanocene and the Plantationcene" *Critical Philosophy of Race*, special issue on "The Anthropocene and Race," Vol. 7, No.1 (2019), 81-106.

29 Dipesh Chakrabarty,"The Climate of History: Four Theses" *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2009), 197-222.

30 Razmig Keucheyan, *Nature is a Battlefield*, translated by David Broder. (New York and London: Verso, 2016)

covering and foregrounding the effects of environmental racism on both the environment and communities? If we have a 'generic' anthropos as the source of the anthropogenic factors that have given rise to the new climate of the earth, don't we risk concealing the racial history and dimension of those anthropogenic factors? One thing, however, is uncontestable about the Anthropocene, and that is that it is about sediments, sedimentation, layers, layering, and about the stratigraphic record of human actions and human institutions. If so, how does the Anthropocene invite us to sift through the "sedimentation of racial inequality" that has conditioned the production of social and natural space, not just in the United States, but across the planet? In other words, if the Anthropocene allows us to peer into the deep history of the planet, seeing its natural history as a palimpsest of layers and sediments, how can we not also see the sediments left over by the histories of racism, slavery, and environmental racism[31]. What is at stake is much more: how is the production of the "Black Man" –to use Mbembe's term--, a stand in for all the brown folk that will suffer disproportionally the effects of the severe climate that the Anthropocene entails, to be properly incorporated in the valences of the term[32].

As Geographer Laura Pulido invites us to think, the environmental justice movement articulates a powerful critique of enduring and resilient practices of environmental racism that elucidated not just the spatiality of race and racism, but also the various "scales" at which racism exists and operates: individual, collective, institutional, societal, and global[33]. The critique of environmental racism, however, also taught us to see how landscapes are layerings of 'sedimentations of racial inequality.' In a series of more recent essays, Pulido has expanded her analysis of environmental racism to include analyses of white privilege and white su-

31 Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 90 (1), 2000, 12-40, citation at 16.

32 See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics" in *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2003), 11-40. See also his book *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham (NC: Duke University Press, 2017)

33 Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California", 15.

premacy.[34] Her argument is that at first critiques of environmental racism focused on racial inequalities as they were expressed in environmental policies, from allocation of factories, to dumping, to the value of land and real state. This was a negative critique that did not at first show the other face of environmental racism, namely white privilege. For every dump or polluting plant located in the vicinity of a racial minority majority community, a mostly white zone, neighborhood had been passed over, for evident reasons: those communities had the ear of local legislations, their land was more expensive, access to all kinds of resources would have stalled, prevented and rejected similar polluting or potentially hazardous projects. Interestingly, and as Pulido underscores, white privilege does not require "racial animus" –that is the sense that Whites do not deliberately and intentionally aim to produce racial environmental effects. In this sense, neither Whites and non-Whites are discomfited by what then is taken to be as the facts of the matter: that some have access to privileges that they did not merit, but which they nonetheless have access to. Racial inequity is tied to its obverse, racial privilege, but this latter is either naturalized or historicized while neutralizing any kind of racializing intentionality or culpability. In the more recent papers, however, Pulido has noted that a lot of environmental racial inequities and their sedimentation have not simply been the product of 'white privilege,' but actually have been the result of the exercise of white supremacy: non-compliance, violation of regulations, and explicit litigation to resist compliance. In fact, Pulido seeks to show how white supremacy is entwined with regulatory non-compliance that is married to both the awareness of the non-compliance and the explicit taking of local resources through litigation and non-compliance[35].

34 See Pulido's essays: "Geographies of race and ethnicity III: Settler colonialism and nonnative people of color" in *Progress in Geography*, 42 (2) (2017), 1-10; "Geographies of race and ethnicity II: environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence" in *Progress in Human Geography*, 41 (4) (2016): 1-10; "Geographies of race and ethnicity I: White supremacy vs privilige in environmental racism research" in *Progress in Human Geography*, 39 (6) (2015): 1-9.

35 See Pulido, "Geographies of race and ethnicity I: White supremacy vs privilige in environmental racism research", 4-6.

In a 2016 follow up essay, titled "Geographies of race and ethnicity II: Environmental racial, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence", Pulido advances her critiques of some failures in the environmental racism critique by focusing on Cedric J. Robinson's concept of "racial capitalism," which he first introduced in his 1983 *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*[36]. Pulido returns to Robinson in order to highlight the limited, and in the process of retrenchment, gains of the environmental justice movement by considering: first, how racial capitalism generates value by producing social differences that take on the form of racial sedimentations; second, the enduring and attendant devaluation of 'non-white' bodies that have been both included and excluded from the economic process of value generation; and, third, the role of the state in condoning, neglecting, and even sanctioning racial environmental violence[37]. The consideration of racial capitalism leads Pulido to consider "plantation past and futures" in the configurations of racial layerings of modern capitalism (here Pulido quotes Katherine McKittick[38]. Indeed, what Pulido is inviting us to do is to engage in an 'archeology of environmental racism.'[39]. Racial capitalism and the critique of environmental racism, in fact, allow us to see more clearly how the Anthropocene has been the result not only of local forms of environmental apartheid, but of the planetarization of the plantation regime that has imposed what Ashley Dawson has called "climate apartheid"[40].

I have appealed to Pulido because she allows me to foreground a group of key themes that I want to explore in these Anthropoceneological reflections. First, there is the theme of the spatiality of race, and more

36 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1983])

37 See Pulido, "Geographies of race and ethnicity II: environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence", 2.

38 Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" in *Small Axe*, Volume. 17, No. 3 (November 2013, No. 42), 1-15.

39 Keucheyan, *Nature is a Battlefield*, 34.

40 Ashley Dawson, *Extreme Cities: The Perils and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (London and New York: Verso, 2017), 189.

specifically, the spatiality of racial inequity as it takes the form of environmental racisms, which relies on both white privilege and white supremacy. Second, we have the theme of the production of Natural/Social (Society/Nature) space through practices of social differentiation that require the inclusion and expulsion of some humans from the realm of the Human and their relegation to the realm of the Natural (I am using expulsion in the sense meant by Saskia Sassen[41]). Third, and perhaps more importantly, because Pulido re-centers the role of the plantation in the generation of value that racial capitalism requires. I want to argue that the Anthropocene invites us to project new imaginaries and to think from different locales: from the Apollo capsules, as Kelly Oliver has done[42], or from the standpoint of the Slave Ship as I have done elsewhere[43]. The plantation is to the Anthropocene as the slave ship is to racial capitalism. The plantation is the chronotope that allows us to elucidate the ways in which what decolonial theorist Achille Mbembe calls 'Necropower and Late Modern Colonial occupation' is urbanized in the Anthropocene[44]. The *Plantationcene, as I argue here, is the Urbanocene face of the Capitalocene, its necropolitical face*.

In order to weave together these themes, I want to: first, explore the relationship of what I will call here, following Dungy and Alexander felicitously called "Black Nature"[45], in order to argue that the historical, that is, the capitalist, production of Nature/Society dyad, requires that we attend to the production of "Black Nature" as the correlative of histor-

41 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

42 Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World*: *Philosophy after the Apollo Missisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

43 See my essay: ""Benito Cereno," or, the American Chronotope of Slavery" in Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi, eds. *Melville among the Philosophers* (Lanham: Lexington, 2017), 169-188.

44 Mbembe, "Necropolitics", 25.

45 See Camille Dungy, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), see also the review by Robert, "Black Nature" in *Ecotone*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (Spring 2012), 32-45.

ical-racial capitalism[46]; second, I then consider the relationship between the global production and implementation of environmental apartheid through the racializing practices of racial capitalism that in turn spatialize race into urban space. The thesis here is that if we are to understand the Anthropocene as the Urbanocene, i.e. that part of the story of the emergence of the Anthropocene is the mega-urbanization of humanity, driven by the urban logics of capitalism[47], and if we consider that most of the urban growth of the next half a century is going to be in the so-called Global South, then we have to link the Urbanocene to what I will call, the Plantationcene. I want to coin this term to link the rise of racial capitalism with one of its essential institutions: the plantation. As George L. Beckford has shown, the development of underdevelopment, and the enduring poverty of the developing world, is linked to the still present logics of the plantation system[48]. We can say, we still live in the plantation, even when we turned them into modern closed off urban centers (as we can see in Florida, where one can find closed off living centers with the name "plantation").

The aim here is to think together and intersectionally: race (with gender, which I have bracketed for time constraints), climate, and the urban condition in the Anthropocene. If we think that most of the global cities of the Urbanocene are in the most vulnerable zones of the planet, and that many of these mega-urbes are burdened with the histories of colonialism and imperialism, then, we have to begin to disentangle the relationship between what I call Anthropocenic Urbanism and what Dawson has called Climate Apartheid.

46 See Jason Moore, "The Rise of Cheap Nature" in Jason W. Moore, ed. 2016. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene: Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, Ca: PM Press, 2016) 78-115.

47 See David Harvey, "The Crisis of Planetary Urbanization" in Gahanho, P. ed., 2014. *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014) 26-31; *Rebel Cities: Rom the Right to the City to the Urban Explosion* (New York and London: Verso, 2013); "Globalization and the "Spatial Fix" *Geograpische Revue* 2, (2001) 23-30; and *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

48 George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty*: *Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)

The discourses of anthropocenologists invite polemics as well as satire, as Bonneuil and Fressoz amply illustrate. Karl Marx used the power of satire, irony, and mockery to unmask as much as to demonstrate fallacies and argumentative absurdities. A now almost forgotten book of the young Marx merits resuscitation and close reading in these times of the metaphysics of Anthropocentic Promethianism. I am referring to his 1847 book against Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the saints in the calendar of anarchism, but also someone whom we should be also reading in this age of the expropriation of nature. The book, titled in French, *Misère de la Philosophie. Rèponse a La Philosophie de la Misère de Mr. Proudhon*, has been translated as the *Poverty of Philosophy*, which partly loses the deeply negative dimensions of Marx's ironic flip of Proudhon's own title: *the philosophy of misery*[49]. I noted above that the Anthropocene invites us to enrich our vocabulary, but the terms also has impoverished it, as I hope to have shown so far. Today, we have to resist the continuing erosion of our lexicons of resistance and critique. In Chapter II, titled "The Metaphysics of Political Economy," Marx takes on Proudhon's attempt to offer a metaphysics of modes of production, which dehistoricizes both the method of analysis and the institutions that make up the economy. Marx proceeds to elucidate Proudhon's implicit method through the discussion of seven "observations." For my purposes here, I want to focus on the "fourth observation," which is interested in Proudhon's idea that every "economic category" has two sides: one good and the other bad; one benign, the other malignant. Such things are said of the market and the way that without slavery and its abolition, we would not have reached the levels of both development and integration that mark this age of so-called globalization. In any event, for Proudhon, every economic category entails a contradiction, which we ought to resolve by keeping the "good side, while eliminating the bad"[50]. What is to be kept and what

49 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Poverty of Philosophy" in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Marx and Engels: 1845-48 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976)

50 Ibid., 167.

is to be thrown out of the economic institution and category of Slavery, asks Marx? Then, he answers:

> *Slavery* is an economic category like any other. Thus it also has its two sides. Let us leave alone the bad side and talk about the good side of slavery. Needless to say we are dealing only with direct slavery, with Negro slavery in Surinam, in Brazil, in the Southern States of North America. Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.
>
> Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy—the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.[51]

Arguably, Marx is deploying dark humor here to talk about the "good" side of Slavery, namely that it gave rise to the system of world trade, and that it was also essential to the rise of what he calls also "the most progressive of countries". I want to interpolate in Marx's passage, in light of the fact that Slavery was materialized in three other "pivots" of bourgeois industry: the slave ship, the auction bloc, and the plantation. Slavery is a general name that links and occludes these mechanisms, pivots, and relay devices. So, the interpolated passage would read: "without the slave ship, the auction bloc and the plantation, no sugar, no tobacco, no cotton, and later no rice. Without these, you have no modern industry. No modern racial capitalism."

Almost a hundred years later Eric Williams will expand these "observations" of the young Marx and offer us one of the most detailed analysis of the dependence of the rise of British capitalism on Negro

51 Ibid., 167. Italics in original.

Slavery in the New World[52]. Williams shows how British capitalism, commerce, shipping, and global enterprises mobilized millions of people from across the globe in order to generate "cheap labor," which required the expropriation, appropriation, and allocation of "cheap nature." The difference between Marx and Williams is that while the one was rejecting the metaphysics of political economy of an anarchist using bad philosophy, the other was confronting a theodicy of slavery, i.e. that slavery emerged from the racism of the white male mentality. What Williams shows eloquently, is that is was the institutions of capitalism that turned white males into racists. As Williams puts it pithily: "Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery."[53] The question presents itself immediately: What are the institutions, today, that continue to nourish and make racism enduring. What is the equivalent of slavery that spawns the racism that has given us a world divided into metonymic global Norths and global Souths? My contention is that the equivalent are the global economic practices that insure both uneven urban development in the South and enduring economies of dependency. If we live in a colonial present, in which the effects of colonialism are still evident, then we still live in the wake of the institutions linked to the plantation.

For the moment, however, let us say that without cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice, there would have been no global commerce, and thus no capitalism. Without the slave ship, the auction bloc, and the plantation, no racial capitalism. Without expropriation, appropriation and distribution of brown and black bodies and Nature, then no accumulation of surplus value, and thus, no capitalist wealth. This means that when we think about Nature/Society today, we have to recognize the ways in which, to quote Pulido again, "Land is thoroughly saturated with racism"[54] or as Keucheyan writes: "In the modern era, the inextricable link between

52 Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1944)

53 Ibid., 7.

54 Pulido, "Geographies of race and ethnicity II: environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence", 5.

race and nature emerged in particular ecosystem: the slave plantation. The plantation is a total social fact that leaves no sphere untouched; and nature is itself captured by the logic of the plantation, whose end goal is, after all, to draw profit from it."[55]The fact is, as Robert Hass put it in his important review of *Black Nature*, "African-American labor [as well as Native American, and Later Indian and Chinese], life in the country and in the earth, has been responsible for giving shape to large portions of the North American [and we should add the Caribbean, Central and South America] continent for the last four hundred years."[56] This is one way in which we can understand the evocative title of the collection of African American ecopoetry *Black Nature,* already referred to above. There are others, of course.

IV. Conclusion: Black Earth and the Geology of Morality

Arnold Toynbee in his book *Cities on the Move* relates that the improvements in the means of transportation have allowed humans to move massively heavy loads across long distances. This made it possible to remove some of the debris produced by the bombing of London during WWII and transport it to Manhattan to "make land" along the East River side of the Island[57]. Almost every city is built on the debris of its many destructions. As tourists, we turn this necrohistory into urban history lessons, as we peer into glass covered floors that reveal to us what lay underneath, when the Roman, British, French, Spaniards, or Americans, had their imperial outposts there. Urban dwellings are built on top of sediments of human destruction. They offer a unique glimpse into the geology of morality. The Anthropocene has also forced us to peer into the abyss of 'deep time,' the time of the natural history of the earth, but in a radically different way. For what we now see as the layering of the earth are no

55 Keucheyan, *Nature is a Battlefield*, 34.

56 Hass, "Black Nature", 34.

57 Arnold Toynbee, *Cities on the Move*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 16.

longer the sediments of millions and millions of years of the slow metabolic processes of the earth, but the sediments of human activities. Now, everywhere we look, we find the stratigraphic record of massive human action. The Anthropocene has been offered as a new name for a new period in planetary, geologic, history. It has already produced a tremendous amount of debate, proliferating in cognates. Imitation is the highest form of flattery, goes the saying, and so it is with this term. In this essay, I have sought to foreground the epistemic and moral dimensions of the term by focusing on the interlink processes of race making and urbanization over the period that was inaugurated with the so-called discovery of the New World. One the one hand, we have the genocide of Amerindians, which left its own stratigraphic marker. On the other, we have the earth that was toiled by slaves. *Slavery left behind its own sediment: black earth. This is also another dimension of the geology of morality.*

One of the faces of the Anthropocene is the megaurbe. Another of its faces, is its racial and global inequity. But these two faces are linked: the process of global urbanization is also a process of global gerrymandering, of global ghettoization. One of the key contentions with the introduction of the Anthropocene is that we are about to enter an age of 'severe weather.' This severe weather will, however, affect different human differently. The Anthropocene is also the age of what was called above 'climate apartheid.' We can't have climate apartheid in the Anthropocene without a certain urbanization of global inequity, one that is built and perpetuated by the logics of the plantation system that enabled the rise of racial capitalism. I introduced the term Plantationcene to put the spotlight on these imbrications and logics. *The Plantationcene, I have argued, is the Urbanocene face of the Capitalocene, which is its necropolitical face*. The Anthropocene challenges us to sift through this geology as well.

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Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

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.

Therefore, we are planning to link the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt school to the problems of our age. This means that we are looking for original and high-quality articles in the field of critical theory. To reach our goals, we gathered some of the leading scholars of critical theory in our editorial board to select the best articles for this journal.

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