

**‘Social Constitution and
Reconciliation in Hegel and
Adorno’**

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the relationship between two key concepts in the 'Critical Tradition' within German philosophy: *social constitution* and *reconciliation* (or social autonomy). The former stresses the importance of understanding all forms of social organisation as practically constituted by flesh-and-blood human beings and resists the tendency to reify particular social forms. The latter stresses the ethical value of types of social organisation that resist forms of estrangement and promote the recognition of human dignity. Both concepts can be essentially read as responses to the problem of alienation.

I locate the origin of both notions in the thought of G.W.F. Hegel, albeit in an inchoate form. I then move on to assess their development in the thought of Theodor W. Adorno. It is Adorno's use of Hegelian categories that allows him to articulate why the world that we practically create takes upon the appearance of something above and beyond our control. This, I believe, gives him a critical edge over his second generation Frankfurt School critics, whom tend towards the reification of the capitalist social form.

What ultimately differentiates Adorno from both Hegel, on the one hand, and the second generation Frankfurt School, on the other, is the *materialist* turn in his thinking. This inflects both his commitment to a concept of social constitution which incorporates the natural as well as the cultural in addition to his conception of social autonomy (or *solidarity*) rooted in a bodily response to need and suffering.

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1) Introduction

1) After Auschwitz

Theodor Adorno wrote against a backdrop of unimaginable barbarism.¹ Those who had promised the liberation of mankind and mankind's liberation from philosophy had delivered uncompromising cruelty from Moscow to Beijing, whilst Western Europe emerged from the shadow of Nazi genocide.² For Adorno, the atrocities of the twentieth century had made a mockery of the optimistic narratives of historical progress that had characterised the philosophical traditions of the previous two centuries. Equally, however, neither Auschwitz nor the Gulags could signal anything permanent or immutable about the human condition. Such absolute despair, for Adorno, would be heretical in light of the victims suffering. Instead, our overriding imperative in light of such barbarism was to arrange our 'thinking and conduct' so that that 'nothing similar ever happens again'.³

Adorno's response here is deeply aporetic, as he had nothing even approaching a political programme for delivering upon such an imperative. Indeed, the retreat

¹ Theodor Wiesgrund Adorno (1903-1969). Principle works referred to in the thesis are *Negative Dialectics* (1973) translated by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul), *Minima Moralia* (1974) translated by E.F.N Jephcott (London: Verso), *Hegel: Three Studies* (1993) translated by Shirley Weber-Nicholson (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (2000) translated by Rodney Livingstone (Oxford: Blackwell), *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1997) (with Max Horkheimer) translated by John Cumming (London: Verso), *Aesthetic Theory* (1997) translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Athlone, London). Other texts and essays are referenced separately.

² Adorno (1973) p.1. Marx (1992) p. 57.

³ Adorno (1973) p. 365.

into obscure works of 20th Century modernism for which Adorno was most famous appear to imply a supreme indifference towards the practical matters of politics. On the one hand, this is because of the depth at which Adorno takes the problem to lie. He does not take the holocaust, for example, to be a unique deviation from the otherwise triumphant march of reason and enlightenment but, instead, presents it as the *apogee* of a universal process of societal rationalisation, in which relationships between human beings become ever more instrumental. Auschwitz is the culmination of Enlightenment's dark side rather than the diametric opposite of enlightened reason. This is only part of the story, however, as Adorno is also committed to a highly radical notion of *social constitution*, of human beings as socially, self-determining beings. Such a notion refuses to confine the possibilities for the development of human societies to the terms of present social organisation. Indeed, it is in virtue of such a utopian moment in Adorno's thinking that the uncompromising nature of his politics is to be understood. Adorno's extreme negativism towards the society of Max Weber's 'iron cage'⁴ combined with his utopian commitment to the possibility of radically different forms of social organisation sits uncomfortably with our everyday understanding of politics as negotiating compromises between unsavoury options.

⁴ Sheldon Wolin offers an excellent account of Weber's iron cage, defining it in terms of "legal codes and administrative organisations that promise order, predictable decisions, regularity of procedures, and responsible, objective and qualified officials; into economics that operate according to principles of calculated advantage, efficiency and means-end strategies; into technologies that promote standardisation, mechanical behaviours and uniform tastes." Wolin, S. (1984) *Max Weber: Legitimation, Method and the Politics of Theory* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford) p. 71.

This dialectic, between a utopian exploration of social possibility and an impotent pessimism in the face of barbarism, highlights a key problem in the critical tradition. How exactly can this radical commitment to a notion of social constitution be reconciled with our situatedness in a world we are apparently impotent to change? The key claim of critical theory is that, however much forms of social relations may have the *appearance* of immutability, existing above and beyond human social practice, the social and practical constitution of such abstractions can be unpacked. The closed discourse of ‘economics’, for example, is not a timeless set of rules and laws, against which societies can measure their success or failure, but a distillation of perverted social practices, already presupposing the commoditization and alienation of human labour. Key to this understanding is the notion of *inversion*. It is the labour of human subjects that is the material basis of the reproduction of capitalist society and yet, in the mechanism of exchange, we come to see value as a mystical property of the commodity itself rather than as an expression of a social relation between producers. For Adorno, this understanding of social processes being inverted or ‘passing into’ their opposite is rooted in the *Hegelian* notion of dialectic.⁵

To appropriate Hegel’s metaphysics for critical purposes is a risky business, as Hegel’s central notion of *Spirit* is radically incompatible with materialist thinking. Firstly, *Spirit qua* god, is an autonomous source of content of which we

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). Principle works referred to in the thesis are *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford, OUP), *Faith and Knowledge* (1977b) (Albany, State University of NY Press), *Encyclopaedia Logic* (1991) tr. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Hackett, Indianapolis), *Science of Logic* (1998) tr. A.V. Miller (OUP, Oxford), *The Philosophy of Right* (1991) translated by Allen Wood (OUP, Oxford), *Early Theological Writings* (1961) (University of Pennsylvania Press). Other texts are referenced separately.

humans are merely vehicles. Secondly, *Spirit* operates according to a strictly teleological sense of rational necessity, which undermines the notion of social constitution. Finally, grasping the movement of the Absolute from the inside requires access to an avowedly mystical form of experience. Despite this, however, there is an important sense in which an understanding of Hegel is essential to the theory of social constitution, which is best articulated in Adorno's *Three Studies* and *Negative Dialectics*. Reading Hegel's philosophy, not in its own terms but as a sedimentation of social relations, Adorno takes the operation of *Spirit* to be analogous to the operation of capital in its subsumption and incorporation of all heterogeneous qualities into the universal. Furthermore, Hegel's failure to recognise *Spirit* as an alienated form of human social practice, instead representing it as a manifestation of God, is analogous to the failure of human subjects to recognise capital as an alienated form of living labour. Understanding Hegel in this way gives us clues as to how to conceptualise this process of inversion.

In addition, the idea of social constitution is not merely a tool for the critical theorist to unveil the socio-practical content of seemingly abstract and immutable categories. It also provides a powerful *ethical* critique of alienation and disempowerment. The object of critique is, in Adorno's words, a life that no longer lives, seemingly operating in accordance with a logic outside the practical activity of human subjects. The implicit ethical aim of critical theory is thus *social autonomy*, whereby subjects are able to collectively take control over their destiny. It is the connection between social constitution and social autonomy that is the focus of this thesis.

Again, it is to Hegel that we must initially turn to grasp the significance of this idea. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel develops the notion of *mutual recognition*, a radically egalitarian state of affairs in which each mutually recognises the moral worth of each other.⁶ This idea is strongly connected to the Hegelian idea of *reconciliation*, whereby the social world acts as the foundation and source of each individual's sense of value and self-determination.. Reconciliation, in its Hegelian guise, is a concept of human freedom which both builds upon and challenges the negative formulation of freedom found in much liberal thought (that is an idea of freedom restricted to discussion of the legitimate boundaries of state interference in the lives of individuals). It is not the case that Hegel thinks of the demands of negative freedom as unimportant. Such demands fall under the heading of "abstract right", a key component of ethical life. However, Hegel wants to broaden discussion to question why we take forms of social authority to be alien in the first place – such that we can only think of freedom as a conflict between the interests of the state and those of individuals. Freedom of a more comprehensive nature is attained within social forms that satisfy deep human needs (primarily the need for recognition) and, hence, with which subjects can identify. Reconciliation, thus, can be read as an antonym for alienation and, more generally, as a concept which connects the discussion of alienation to the question of human freedom.

Hegel shifts from a more radical, egalitarian position in his later work, as reconciliation is deemed only to be possible within an institutional framework comprised of the nuclear family, a market economy and a strong state to crush

⁶ Hegel (1977) pp. 104-110.

the 'penurious rabble'⁷ whose existence is a tragic but necessary consequence of the injustices of capitalism. For Adorno, this constitutes a cowardly capitulation.

In many ways, the difference between Hegel's modest faith in the institutions of the modern world and Adorno's radical negativism can be explained historically. Hegel writes in the aftermath of a wave of revolutionary optimism across Europe and sees his task as convincing his contemporaries that there is a fundamental rationality to the institutions and practices of the modern world. Such institutions and practices are capable of instantiating an almost spontaneous sense of obligation and morality in modern subjects. In contradistinction, Adorno provides an account of a world 'after Auschwitz' in which the dominant institutional forms (and interlinked forms of consciousness) continually undermine any motivational basis for ethical action. In light of the horrors of the twentieth century, it is mutual indifference that is the predominant form of ethical relationship.

However, the historical compulsion, after Auschwitz, to develop critique to a more radical point cannot alone explain the difference in Hegel and Adorno's positions. The difference is also philosophical. As I shall later argue, although Hegel begins with a critical procedure, determinate negation, this procedure is compromised by the limitations of his notion of the *negation of the negation*. In Hegel, negation always moves back to the positive. For example, the negation of one limited form of the market state (*der Notstaat*) leads us to a more comprehensive idea of the rational state (*der Staat*).⁸ Adorno, however, takes as his starting point the negation of negative conditions and, as such, his thinking has far a more radical reach than Hegel's social theory. What allows Adorno to

⁷ Hegel (1991) p. 267.

⁸ See, for example, Hegel (1991) p. 275.

make this move, a move unavailable to Hegel, is that he is committed to the notion of social constitution. Critique, in Hegel, is always ultimately limited by the designs of *Spirit*, an autonomous source of content which is structured in terms of its formal-final cause. In Adorno, in contradistinction, critique is open-ended, as a consequence of his commitment to social constitution..

As I have suggested, the idea of social constitution can be taken to express the simple idea that social forms owe their entire existence to the socio-practical activity of human beings. As a form of critique, it resists any tendency to view social forms as fixed, immutable or subject to laws outside the control of practical human activity. It identifies such tendencies with the condition of alienation – whereby the world is felt to operate in accordance with its own, independent logic. According to the idea of social constitution, however, the condition of alienation can itself be understood in terms of the societal mechanisms of inversion and reification which characterise the capitalist social form.

2) Social Autonomy and Liberal Autonomy

Before proceeding, it is worth noting in more detail how such notions of social constitution and reconciliation sit in relation to the more dominant liberal tradition in political philosophy, in order to grasp what is at stake in a broader sense. On the one hand, it would appear that modern liberal thinking has been shaped by rejection of the very traditions (of German Idealism and Marxism) in which such notions are anchored.⁹ This can be understood, in part, as a reaction against the grim record of ‘really existing socialism’ in the 20th Century. In the

⁹ Two famous tracts in which such a rejection is made explicit are Berlin, I. (1969) *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, OUP) and Popper, K. (1968) *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Routledge, London).

shadow of the gulags, all large-scale projects of societal transformation are cast as totalitarian.¹⁰ Additionally, such a rejection must be understood against the backdrop of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the growing acceptance of economic liberalism and the lack of any apparent alternatives to global capitalism.

If, negatively, liberalism has been characterised in terms of a suspicion of authoritarianism, positively, it has tended to be associated with a commitment to autonomy. Crudely understood, this has meant an understanding of freedom, as Hegel once remarked disapprovingly, as the freedom 'to do as one pleases'.¹¹ A free society is one in which governmental authority interferes as little as possible in the lives of its citizens and whereby individuals are able to pursue whatever lifestyle choices, desires or preferences they see fit, unless, of course, such actions cause readily identifiable damage to persons or property.

This, of course, would be to oversimplify grossly. Firstly, the commitment to autonomy can be seen to overlap with the critical tradition via thinkers such as Kant and Fichte. If the claim of the minimal or negative notion of freedom is that it best allows people to spontaneously pursue *their own* desires and inclinations, then it must provide an account of whether or not such actions genuinely stem from the individual herself. There are many instances where we act not independently on the basis of our own authority but on the basis of social pressures, for example, the demands made upon us by the mass media, marketing strategists, advertisers, religious authorities, new age mystics and celebrity role

¹⁰ See, for example, Zizek, S. (2001) *Did somebody say totalitarianism? : Five interventions in the (mis)use of a Notion* (Verson, London) for a good account of the liberal manipulation of the concept of totalitarianism.

¹¹ Hegel (1991) *The Philosophy of Right* (OUP, Oxford) p. 48.

models. Indeed, in a world in which we are constantly surrounded by such pressures, we must have reason to think that the desires and inclinations we pursue are 'our own' and that we act upon them for good reasons which we can make intelligible to ourselves and others. What we require is some form of reasoning process or a series of thought experiments that help us to determine whether or not we are the source of authority of our actions. Hence, freedom cannot be so easily separated from an account of rationality and we begin to push in the direction of a Kantian-Fichteian¹² notion of autonomy, if we think that it is something worth taking seriously.

This commitment can be developed further: If freedom requires self-determination, or a certain critical orientation towards our impulses, desires and the social world in general, then an account must be given as to how social institutions and practices best nurture such a capacity in individuals. To take freedom seriously as a valuable (perhaps *the* most valuable) social goal, one must give a thicker account of the form of social organisation best placed to procure it. Such social forms must not only maintain and protect the practical operation of our freedom, for example, providing protection for civil liberties, or upholding due legal procedure. They must also provide a cultural environment in

¹² Kant and his successor Fichte share an understanding of autonomy that involves taking a particular stance towards ones contingent desires and inclinations. One is free only when one acts on the basis of reason, as to act on the basis of desire and inclination is a form of heteronomy. For Kant's account of freedom see Kant, I. (1993) *The Critique of Practical Reason* (trans L.W. Beck) (Macmillian, New York). See also Kant, I. (1964) *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (tr. H. Paton) (HarperCollins, New York). For Fichte's account of autonomy see Fichte, G. (1982) *The Science of Knowledge* (tr. Heath and Lacks) (CUP, Cambridge).

which the goal of self-determination is socially and culturally instantiated.¹³ At this point we are not far from a Hegelian account of social autonomy.

Furthermore, many liberals envisage a fundamental role for society in guaranteeing the autonomy of individuals in that it must distribute wealth and resources such that people are not merely 'free' in the abstract (people are all technically 'free' to buy whatever is legally available on the market) but free in the sense that they can tangibly pursue their life projects on an equal footing.¹⁴ However, such concerns tend to be confined to the sphere of distribution and circulation and do not touch the basis of production in alienated labour. Adopting the notions of social constitution and social autonomy allows us not only to

¹³ Much can be said by value pluralists to counter the idea that social institutions be responsible for nurturing such a thick notion of autonomy, particularly in that it does not recognise cultures or religious believers whose understanding of authority is incompatible with a strong notion of autonomy. I do not fully address this question in the thesis for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I take something of a Marxist view that such cultural or religious determinations are fluid and contingent upon relations of power and should never be essentialised. Marxists tend to treat the problem of cultural difference from the point of view of its potential transcendence – as something to be dissolved in the realisation of a common humanity. What this thesis is largely concerned with is how freedom is so integral to grasping what this common humanity might mean. Secondly, as I will argue, I take the Hegelian notion of freedom to be far richer and more inclusive than more narrowly liberal understandings of autonomy.

¹⁴ Much can be said regarding the libertarian challenge to such egalitarian commitments as being illiberal, although the vast discussion of the relationship between social justice and freedom falls outside the scope of this thesis. For an important Libertarian critique of egalitarianism see Nozick, R. (1977) *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Basic Books, New York). For the classic liberal defence of egalitarianism see Rawls, J. (1972) *A Theory of Justice* (OUP, London). See also Barry, B. *Justice as Impartiality*. For a Marxist critique of Liberal egalitarianism see Calinicos, A. (2000) *Equality* (Malden, MA).

envisage possibilities beyond the relationship of wage labour but also underlines the ethical imperative for doing so. It is this concern with alienation in addition to social justice as a presupposition of autonomy that can be seen to a distinctive feature of the critical tradition. The claim is that freedom requires the existence of universally available meaningful and flourishing life projects through which we can freely establish our identities. If the roles we occupy are alienating and degrading then we will always see the world as a barrier to our sense of autonomy. If the social world provides us with a sense of recognition or self-worth then we take such a world to be *facilitating* our sense of autonomy.

Thus, the idea of social autonomy can be taken to be a development of many of the themes of the liberal account of autonomy. Social autonomy requires (a) the legal and constitutional guarantee of our basic freedoms (b) a material basis for being able to pursue our life-projects (c) a capacity for identifying our drives and inclinations as *our own* and (d) a form of social organisation that ethically engenders such a capacity but also that we have (e) the existence (and recognition) of meaningful goals, activities and exercises in self-development and creativity. If the world confronts us as degrading and alienating then we lose something very important in terms of human freedom. These various components go some way towards defining what an idea of social autonomy might look like, *contra* the minimal notion of negative liberty. However, if treated seriously, they also constitute a powerful ethical rejection of many

features of what has become Marxist orthodoxy.¹⁵ The idea of social autonomy is as opposed to crude Marxist-Leninist collectivism as it is to liberal atomism.

Firstly, the idea of social constitution excludes the possibility of substituting the self-activity of those in struggle with the operation of a revolutionary vanguard. Societal transformation cannot be imposed upon subjects, as it is only in self-activity that the 'spell' of reification is broken. Secondly, the ethical idea of social autonomy excludes the possibility of instrumentally suspending the commitment to self-determination in the name of revolution, for example, through 'democratic centralism' or calculated acts of terror or brutality. If we trace the origin of the concept from the Kantian Kingdom of Ends, through Hegel's commitment to the mutual acknowledgement of moral worth to Marx's critique of the devaluation of human dignity, a sharp contrast should be obvious to the trajectory of Marxist-Leninism.¹⁶

3) Recent Developments in the Interpretation of Hegel

Having given an initial outline of the problem and its relationship to the broader concerns of political philosophy, I now want to examine the relationship of this thesis to existing scholarship on both Hegel and Adorno, starting with Hegel. The interpretation and appropriation of Hegel's work is perhaps

¹⁵ For an examination of the role of ethics in orthodox Marxism see, for example, Lukes, S. (1985) *Marx and Morality* (OUP, Oxford), Buchanan, A. (1982) *Marx and Justice: The Political Critique of Liberalism* (Rowman and Littlefields, London), Plamenatz, J. (1975) *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man* (OUP, Oxford), Wood, A. (1981) *Karl Marx* (Routledge, Keegan and Paul, London) and Geras, N. (1985) *The controversy over Marx and Justice* (New Left Review 158).

¹⁶ See, for example, Lenin, V.I. (1966) 1920 Speech at the 3rd Komosal Congress, 2 Oct 1920 in *Collected Works Vol. 31* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Progress Publishing, Moscow) and Trotsky, L., Dewey, J. And Novach, G. (1982) *Their Morals and Ours* (New York, Pathfinder).

unparalleled in the level of contention and controversy it arouses. Even in Hegel's own times, his adherents were split into conservative monarchists and theologians, on the one hand, and radical reformists, on the other, both of which saw Hegel as 'their man'. Since the emergence of Marxism, Hegel has largely been seen as a political reactionary whose most radical contribution to political thought was found in his contribution to logic (the dialectic) and not in his political philosophy. By the mid 20th Century, Hegel had been re-invented as a totalitarian menace, strongly attacked in two tracts that were to become canonical in the liberal response to totalitarianism. These are Berlin's 'Two concepts of Liberty' and Popper's 'Open Society and its Enemies'.¹⁷ Such an interpretation, however, finds few adherents amongst Hegel scholars.¹⁸ Furthermore, the image of Hegel as an apologist for Prussian despotism has now become something of a myth in the light of recent historical work.¹⁹ As a consequence of this and of the decline of Marxism, interest has re-emerged in Hegel in his own right, particularly in the ethical foundations of his thinking. In terms of the re-introduction of Hegel into political philosophy we can think of Charles Taylor's *Hegel and Modern Society* and Allen Wood's *Hegel's Ethical Thought*²⁰ as ground breaking works. Both, instead of treating Hegel's political

¹⁷ Berlin, I. (1969) *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, OUP). Popper, K. (1968) *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Routledge, London).

¹⁸ See Franco, P. (2000) *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (Yale University Press, New Haven) p. 180-82, Beiser (2005) *Hegel* (Routledge, London) p. 202-5 and Patten (1999) *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (OUP, Oxford) p73-82 for some good responses to Berlin

¹⁹ See Beiser (2005) p219-223

²⁰ Wood, A. (1990) *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (CUP, Cambridge). Taylor, C. (1979) *Hegel and Modern Society* (CUP, Cambridge).

philosophy as some sort of throwback from nineteenth century Prussia, treat the ethical foundations of Hegel's thinking seriously and analytically.

Within the last decade, a number of important contributions have been made to the understanding of Hegel's political philosophy, particularly focusing on the notions of reconciliation and freedom. Hardimon's *Hegel's Social Philosophy : The Project of Reconciliation*²¹ takes on the widespread belief that the idea of reconciliation is inherently conservative, with the project of making us feel 'at home in the world' being simply a means of adjusting us to existing structures of power instead of providing us with a basis for criticism. Hegel is, instead, presented as being engaged in a type of immanent critique, holding institutions and practices up to account in terms of the conspicuous ethical standards to which they appeal. That Hegel refuses to posit any basis for ethical criteria outside actually lived social practices does not mean that he is a political reactionary.

Following from this work, a number of others have attempted to grapple with Hegel's understanding of reconciliation, only strategically choosing to adopt the language of freedom due to the conservative connotations of the idea of reconciliation.²² Alan Patten's *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*²³ adopts a strongly Kantian-Fichtean interpretation of Hegel, although he also stresses Hegel's uniqueness in terms of the emphasis he places on recognition and *Bildung* as necessary pre-requisites for freedom. Furthermore, Patten's 'civic humanist' reading of Hegel offers a direct challenge to more entrenched understandings of

²¹ Hardimon, Michael (1994) *Hegel's Social Philosophy, The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge, CUP)

²² Neuhauser, F. (2000) *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory* (Harvard, Cambridge) p. 3.

²³ Patten, Alan (1999) *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* (Oxford, OUP).

his work, namely readings of Hegel as a conventionalist, historicist or as a metaphysical mystic. Covering much of the same ground, although addressed more in terms of social theory, is Fredrick Neuhouer's *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory, Actualising Freedom*.²⁴ Neuhouer gives an impressive account of the ethical basis of Hegel's notion of freedom qua reconciliation, stressing the vital importance of our roles within social institutions as being a source of our identities and self-worth. Finally, and of particular interest, is Dudley Knowles' *Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*²⁵ a work which, written from more of a moral philosophy standpoint, manages to do a great deal of justice to the complexity of Hegel's conception of freedom. In such works, amongst others, Hegel is taken to have much to say in terms of debates in contemporary political philosophy, in areas such as the balancing of rights and social obligations, the relationship between particular identities and universal citizenship and civic participation and education.

Whilst these texts have done much to promote Hegel from the realm of historical curiosity to a figure with much to add to contemporary debates in political philosophy, I still take there to be problems in terms of how Hegel can 'speak' to us arising from the nature of the world in which he wrote. Firstly, when Hegel was writing, capitalism was very much in its infancy. This makes his insistence that the realm of civil society²⁶ could remain distinct and bounded,

²⁴ Neuhouer, F. (2000).

²⁵ Knowles, D. (2002) *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* (Routledge, London).

²⁶ Hegel means something very different by 'civil society' compared to our contemporary understanding. Civil society essentially refers to the market, whereby individuals, whilst working on the basis of self-interest, come to meet common need. This term contrasts with the state, which, for Hegel, is established upon the idea of citizenship. Citizenship, for Hegel, is based

alongside the distinct realms of the private sphere and the state, appear rather naïve. Since Hegel's day we have seen the emergence of mass industrial capitalism and a corresponding decline in traditional social bonds. This has created immense challenges for any ethical project of reconciliation. Secondly, the world in which Hegel lived was one of expectation and optimism, situated in the aftermath of a wave of revolutionary activity across Europe. In the world in which we find ourselves now, such faith is more ambiguous. We know that modernity has provided us with the means to cure previously incurable diseases, provide universal education, feed and shelter the global population etc. but also that such things are systematically denied to vast sections of the global population. Moreover, the 20th century is littered with examples of obscene brutality and violence, from the holocaust to the genocide in Rwanda. As I have suggested, it is the viability of the pursuit of reconciliation after Auschwitz that is the subject of this thesis, something which has not explicitly been addressed in the literature.

4) Recent Developments in the Interpretation of Adorno

The interpretation and appropriation of Adorno's work has also undergone a considerable shift. Initially, Adorno was regarded as inseparable from the Marxist Tradition in general and the Frankfurt School specifically. The work of the Frankfurt School responded to many of the challenges facing the progressive left of its time, situated in the context of the rise and fall of fascism in Europe, the horrors of 'really existing socialism' and the growing acceptance of consumer capitalism by the western populace. The interdisciplinary approach of the Frankfurt School, drawing upon disciplines which were hitherto not usually

upon a self-conscious identification with the state as serving the public good. See Patten (1999) p. 167-76 for an interesting discussion of this distinction.

associated with Marxism, such as psychoanalysis, literary criticism and aesthetics, attempted to find new resources to face down such challenges.²⁷

Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*²⁸ was widely distributed around European universities during the political tumult of 1968 and is also credited with significantly influencing the US 'New-Left'.²⁹ However, such an appropriation should strike one as immediately odd. Is Adorno not the figure who once declared that he had no interest in political activity because he was 'too fat'?³⁰ It is difficult to think of an individual less at home amid the political radicalism of 1968 than Adorno, who was often portrayed as a rather miserable, self-indulgent aesthete. Of all the members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno would appear to be the furthest removed from anything approaching the traditional left, given his trenchant critique of Enlightenment scientism, his

²⁷ For a seminal account of the history of the Frankfurt School see Wiggershaus, Rolf (1994) *The Frankfurt School Its History, Theories and Political Significance* translated by Michael Robertson (Polity, Cambridge).

²⁸ Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund and Horkheimer, Max (1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* translated by John Cumming (Verso, London).

²⁹ See Rorty, R. (2004) *The Oversimplification of Politics* in Delanty, G. (ed.) *Theodor W Adorno* (Sage, London)

³⁰ 'Adorno had a genius for finding general reasons for doing what he wanted to do and not doing things he wanted to avoid, although sometimes even he seemed to be scraping the bottom of the barrel of his theoretical imagination as when at one point in the 1960s he claimed he could not take part in a political demonstration because he was too fat' Geuss (1999) p. 103.

³¹ Particularly Adorno (2004) and Adorno (1997).

³⁰³² See Hullot-Kentor, (1989) p372-377. Hullot-Kentor, in his historical account of the reception of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, accuses Habermas of being responsible for many misconceptions of the text and its authorship, largely in order to preserve his own self-perceived role as torch-holder of the enlightenment.

seemingly elitist dismissal of mass culture and his scepticism towards any form of political organisation.

Indeed, we are confronted with a puzzle here as it is Adorno who seems to be the only Frankfurt school member who has enjoyed something of a renaissance in the past decade whilst figures such as Marcuse tend to be treated very much as 'of their time'. I suggest that there are a number of reasons why interest in Adorno has increased. Firstly, better translations of texts into English have made Adorno more approachable by scholars outside the German speaking world,³¹ contributing to the growth of Adorno scholarship in the US and UK. Secondly, better interpretative work and scholarship has helped to reclaim Adorno from the overly simplistic caricature of an obscurantist and elitist aesthete. Much of the blame for such a caricature lies with Jurgen Habermas and the second generation Frankfurt School, for whom it was important to mark out the communicative turn as the true inheritance of the aims of critical theory in contrast to the aestheticism of the first generation, for which the blame was left at Adorno's door.³² Thirdly, much of the recent work on Adorno has focused on his contribution to 'ethics', an area of his thought which had been previously neglected. Adorno's work on ethics can be seen to have a great deal of import into contemporary ethical debates, dealing primarily with the predominance of mutual indifference.

Adorno's ethics is always present yet rarely expressed systematically or directly. It is rumoured that Adorno intended to complete a volume on ethics alongside *Negative Dialectics* and aesthetic theory to create a trilogy to mirror Kants's three critiques, but the accuracy of such claims is unclear. His published

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*Lectures on Moral Philosophy*³³ discuss everything but moral philosophy and when Adorno is addressing explicitly moral questions, for example our response to Auschwitz, his argumentation is always suggestive rather than direct and the presentation seemingly chaotic and fragmented.³⁴ Recent work has focused on deciphering Adorno's ethics through an understanding of his epistemology rather than look for any explicit references in his work.³⁵ As I will latter argue, it is in

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³⁴33 Adorno's style or means of philosophical intervention can only be understood in relation to his claim, in *Negative Dialectics*, that concepts as ordinarily used distort or mask social reality. Thus, his aim is to provide a mode of presentation that can properly articulate or at least strive to articulate a non-reified relationship of thought with its object. This leads Adorno to prioritise this objective over and above ease of communication – 'Truth is objective, not plausible' Adorno (1973) p. 42. Perhaps one of the most commonly used devices in Adorno's presentation is parataxis – the positioning of often extreme propositions in a manner which does not indicate relations of integration or subordination between them. This means of presentation evades or circumscribes the conceptual domination of the object by positioning concepts in a 'constellation' whereby each exists unsubordinated to the other.

³⁵ See Bernstein, J. (2001) *Adorno – Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP), Bernstein, J. (2004) *Negative Dialectic as Fate : Adorno and Hegel* in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge), Finlayson, Gordon (2002) *Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable* in *European Journal of Philosophy* (Volume 10: Number 1), Menke, C. (2004) *Genealogy and Critique - Two Forms of Ethical Questioning of Morality* in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge), Schweppenhauser, G. (2004) *Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy* in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge), Pritchard, E. (2004) *Bilderverbot Meets Body in Adorno's Inverse Theology* in Delanty, G. (ed.) *Theodor W. Adorno* (Sage, London).

the critique of *identity thinking*, a rigid and formalised imposition of concepts onto objects, that Adorno's ethics lies, for it is this form of conceptualisation that is responsible for undermining our ability to respond ethically to one another. This capacity, for Adorno, is located in bodily empathy for the suffering of others. In situating our capacity for ethical responses in a bodily, felt notion of *Solidarity*, Adorno is implicitly criticising rule based and formalistic notions of morality. Part of the object of this thesis is to make some of Adorno's ethical claims more explicit, especially in relationship to ideas of freedom and autonomy.

5) Outline of Thesis

I want to begin the thesis with a critical exegesis of Hegel's idea of 'Spirit'. Hegel's concept of 'Spirit' is key to grasping both his understanding of constitution and agency and his notion of freedom as reconciliation. I begin by outlining the problems that the concept of 'Spirit' is intended to address. These can be taken to be the wounds that have emerged in the process of modernity, the schism between human beings and nature, human reason and desire and individuals and society. In addressing Hegel's response to such schisms, I want to emphasise the metaphysical aspects of Hegel's thinking and cast doubt upon non-metaphysical interpretations of *Spirit*, which simply treat it as a synonym for society. I argue that Hegel's understanding of *Spirit* is, firstly, grounded in an idiosyncratic reading of Christianity, secondly, that it is rigidly teleological and, thirdly, that it relies upon a mystical form of experience in order to be

comprehended from the inside. In emphasising such aspects, I highlight some of the potential risks involved in Adorno's attempts to put Hegel back on his feet.

In Chapter Two, I move more specifically to the ethical and political dimension of Hegel's thinking and examine the notion of reconciliation (or social autonomy). This chapter is broken down into examinations of subjective and objective freedom. Under the heading of subjective freedom, I examine what a 'free attitude' entails in relation to both our desires and inclinations and the roles we fulfil in the world. Under the heading of objective freedom, I examine the formative processes embedded in Hegel's conception of 'ethical life', paying particular attention to the role of institutions and practices in securing and nurturing mutual recognition. According to Hegel, the key institutions of ethical life, the family, civil society and the state, in conjunction, allow for individuals to obtain recognition of different aspects of their personhood.

This chapter develops three of the central themes running through the thesis, the relationship between impulse and reason, the notion of 'mutual recognition' and the concept of *Bildung*. If Chapter One highlighted some of the risks involved in appealing to Hegel, this chapter, operating at the level of his social and political thinking, presents Hegel as a more fruitful a resource for understanding human freedom. However, ultimately, Hegel's thinking can be seen to be compromised by the absence of a critique of capitalism. It is here where Adorno steps in.

In Chapter Three, I begin to render problematic Hegel's schema, both at the political and metaphysical levels. Firstly, I want to claim that Hegel's inability to develop a critique of capitalism severely weakens his case that the institutions of ethical life can provide for freedom in a meaningful sense. Secondly, pace

Adorno, I want to claim that this is not merely a problem with Hegel's politics but a problem with his metaphysical starting point. As Adorno argues, the logic of the development of Hegel's *Spirit* is analogous to the logic of capital accumulation. Hegel's system is read as a sedimented expression of the labour-capital relationship, which is antithetical to human emancipation. However, it is precisely by modelling his understanding of capital relations upon Hegel's absolute that Adorno articulates his own critique of capitalism. Features which Adorno identifies with Hegel, for example, the inversion of constituent and constituents or the disavowal of particularity,³⁶ are not read simply as mistakes on Hegel's part but as insights into the mechanism of capital accumulation. More specifically, it is through this analogy that Adorno develops his own notion of social constitution.

In Chapter Four, I develop Adorno's notion of social constitution more closely by focusing upon his critique of 'identity thinking'. I read this critique largely as a means to undermine reified forms of thought and understanding, which treat social relations as fixed and immutable. To begin with, I deal with some key objections to Adorno's critique of identity thinking from the second generation Frankfurt School. For such thinkers, the scope of Adorno's critique is so broad as to undermine its very foundation. To counter these claims, I defend Adorno's version of *immanent critique* (itself developed through Hegel) and take his critics to task for relying upon precisely the sort of transcendental claims that Adorno's thinking seeks to undermine. In the remainder of the chapter I examine some of the models Adorno develops to undermine identity thinking, with particular reference to the influence of Walter Benjamin. Although I argue that Benjamin is hugely influential upon Adorno in this respect, Adorno's Hegelianism ultimately

³⁶ See Chapter Three, section 3.2.

shines through in chastisement of Benjamin for lacking a Hegelian account of mediation.

The final chapter attempts to more closely tie together the notions of social constitution and reconciliation with which I began. I do so by examining Adorno's response to the traditional philosophical oppositions of nature and culture (or reason and impulse). I argue that Adorno adds a materialist inflection to the idea of social constitution in seeking to undermine such oppositions. In one sense, this sets him apart from Hegel, although his dialectical understanding of nature and culture is of an Hegelian form. In 'bringing nature back in' Adorno also develops a notion of reconciliation qua *solidarity*, whereby our ethical responses to one another are rooted in an ability to somatically register the neediness and vulnerability of others. This idea of solidarity can be understood as tying together the ideas of social constitution and reconciliation.

1) Reconciliation and *Spirit*

1) Introduction

This chapter begins to map out what is at stake for Adorno in developing a notion of social-constitution through the critique of Hegel's metaphysics. I focus here on the central concept of Hegel's metaphysics, *Spirit*, which is also the most contested notion in Hegel's thinking, interpreted as anything from God itself through to social relations.³⁷ Hegel scholars are faced with a dilemma in this respect. Either one can try to make Hegel's thinking intelligible without the metaphysics, in which case the result is often something quite vacuous, or else one can embrace Hegel's system and run the risk of leaping into what Michael Rosen describes as a 'neo-platonic fantasy'.³⁸ The account I provide here is sceptical of non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel and argues that *Spirit* is, firstly, irreducibly theological, secondly, restrictively teleological and, thirdly, reliant upon a mystical form of experience in order to comprehend it from the inside. By interpreting Hegel in this way, I highlight the risks of appropriating Hegel's metaphysical categories for Adorno's philosophy of social constitution. However, whilst stressing such risks, this chapter also has the function of introducing many of the Hegelian categories and concepts that I will later take to be essential to Adorno's own development of the notion of dialectic. How Adorno can reconcile the adoption of such critical tools with their mystical roots is the subject of later chapters.

To begin with, I want to look at the problems which Hegel's ontological category of *Spirit* is intended to resolve. I want to contextualise the concept of

³⁷ See Taylor, C. (1975) for the former view and Patten (1999) for the latter view.

³⁸ Rosen, M. (1982) *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism* Cambridge (CUP, Cambridge) p179.

Spirit as a response to a number of conflicts facing modern subjects, namely conflicts between man and nature, reason and desire and individual and society. Each of these conflicts, as I will later argue, can be taken to be of equal concern to Adorno. Hegel's response to such schisms is to understand finite human subjects in terms of a wider framework, as vehicles of infinite *Spirit*. It is only at this level that the conflicts of modernity can be resolved. In order to provide a richer account of this notion I want to draw on its religious, romantic and organicist sources. Understanding such sources also highlights some of the more mystical underpinnings of Hegel's metaphysics. Following on from this discussion, I will focus upon Hegel's account of the development of *Spirit* towards full self-consciousness of itself by looking at the notions of 'determinate negation' and 'rational necessity'. Against many interpreters of Hegel, I argue that Hegel employs a restrictively strong sense of rational necessity. I move on to examine the retrospective character of Hegel's philosophy and its implications for an account of subjectivity, highlighting the difference between it and both Marxist and liberal notions of subjectivity. Next, I examine Rosen's claim that Hegel's system is only intelligible by an appeal to a decidedly mystical form of experience.³⁹ In conclusion, I look at the manner in which the notion of *Spirit* (properly understood) can be said to reconcile some of the conflicts I identified as facing the modern subject.

2) Hegel's account of Subjectivity

Essential to Hegel's project is a drive towards overcoming various oppositions that have emerged following the break up of the expressive unity of the ancient Greek *polis*. Given the ineluctable development of the principle subjectivity in and through the emergence of Christianity, we have become divided from nature,

³⁹ Rosen (1982) p. 179.

both internal and external, from community and from cosmic *Spirit* (or fate).⁴⁰ Hegel's project, broadly speaking, involves reconciling such oppositions whilst retaining the consciousness of differentiation, which is an inevitable consequence of the break down of ancient Greek ethical life. In his attempts to do so, Hegel weaves a course in between the romantic desire for unity and the Kantian-Fichteian trajectory of radical autonomy.

What, then, are these oppositions? Firstly, external nature is no longer seen as possessing or expressing any purpose or idea. Instead, following Kant, it is the human mind that imposes any such form upon external nature. All we can know is things as experienced by the human mind, with nature in-itself placed in the noumenal realm. A schism thus opens up between the human mind on one side (which structures and organises a sensory manifold in accordance with its own necessary form) and raw nature itself.⁴¹ This sets in motion a further opposition between the nature of the human mind as having to know its object thoroughly and its establishment of limits upon what is knowable, limits which can easily

⁴⁰ Taylor (1975) Ch 1.2.

⁴¹This schism is one of the prime concerns of the German romantics, whom sought reconciliation with sensuous nature. Take this example from Schiller's *God's of Greece*:

When poetry's magic cloak,
Still with delight enfolded truth,
Life's fullness flowed through creation,
And there felt what never more will feel,
Man acknowledged a higher nobility in nature,
To press her to loves breast;
Everything to the initiates eye,
Showed the trace of God.

Taken from Ferber, M. (2006) *European Romantic Poetry* (Mishawaka, IN)

slip into a form of scepticism.⁴² Secondly, we experience a division between our own internal drives and desires (our internal nature) and the demands of reason. We want to pursue the noble ideals of the Enlightenment, coldly derived from logic and reason against the pull of obscurantism and irrationalism, yet we also want to do so on the basis of motives and desires that stem from ourselves. However, this would mean taking our own natural drives and desires as authoritative, being governed by nature and not by reason.⁴³ Thirdly, the demand for autonomy stands us against society and community, whose authority is no longer seen as immutable. However, given that such a notion of autonomy is itself a product of *Bildung* (the thick, cultural aspirations which are socially nurtured); the undermining of community authority is itself an undermining of the principle of autonomy.⁴⁴ As I will later argue, we can understand Hegel's idea of *Spirit* as a response to these diremptions.

In order to understand this move, it is necessary to understand more precisely how Hegel conceives of the subject more generally. Charles Taylor claims that

⁴² This was the distinction drawn by Kant and a primary focus of Hegel's criticism. See Kant (1969) *The Critique of Pure Reason* translated by Norman Kemp-Smith (St. Martin, New York) p. 27. For Hegel's response to the noumena-phenomena distinction see, for example, Hegel (1977) p10. I elaborate this response in section 3.1.

⁴³ Again, Kant is the focus here, this time the (1993) *Critique of Practical Reason* which deals with the practical operation of morality. Kant thinks that we act freely and morally only when following reason alone and raising ourselves above our contingent desires and inclinations. I deal with Hegel's response to this claim in detail in Chapter Two.

⁴⁴ This tension was explored at great length by political philosophers of many persuasions of which Hegel was aware and eager to challenge. These include contractarians (for example Hobbes and Locke in the UK and Rousseau in France), German romantics (for example Schiller, and Novalis) in addition to Kant and Fichte.

Hegel draws upon both Aristotle and Herder in his conception of subjectivity. From Aristotle, he takes the notion of human beings as a 'self-organising, self-maintaining form',⁴⁵ which can only operate in material embodiment. This is a radically anti-dualistic conception of human beings. It denies that there is any domain of 'the mind' into which we may withdraw, free from embodiment in our animality. However, whereas it may be plausible to think of human beings as material and yet, in adapting to particular surroundings, demonstrating features we normally associate with 'mind' (i.e. intelligence or merely purpose), the Aristotelian notion of form is very limited. It is difficult to think that mathematics, logic, or problems in moral philosophy, for example, could be seen as embodied in any way in our animality. Here, Taylor claims, Hegel turns to Herder.⁴⁶ Thought, it is argued, must be embodied in an external medium, for example language or art. Not only is thought impossible without language (or any other medium) but the medium itself is inseparable from the content it expresses. Hegel does not, Taylor argues, distinguish between what is added by the content of pure Thought and what is added by its mode of expression. This

⁴⁵ Taylor (1975) p. 81.

⁴⁶ See Herder (2002) *Treatise on the Origin of Language in Philosophical Writings* (CUP, Cambridge) p65-166. 'Without language the human being has no reason and without reason no language' p91. Michael Rosen challenges Taylor's interpretation of Hegel as having directly absorbed Herder's views on language into his thinking. Taylor is claiming that, for Hegel, (1) That there is no thought without language and (2) that thought is shaped by its medium. Rosen argues that Hegel accepts the former claim but is opposed to the latter. According to Rosen, Hegel thinks that Thought is logically independent of its embodiment and that *Spirit* has its own element. As he argues, 'Only by withdrawing into this realm of truth can *Spirit* attain free self-realisation'. Taylor (1975) p. 85.

'expressionist' notion of the subject, therefore, retains the anti-dualism of Aristotle by denying the existence of a realm of pure Thought outside its necessarily embodied existence.

How then are we to understand this relation to nature? If Taylor is right, Hegel thinks that human beings should be seen as a totality but a radically different totality to an amoeba or a sheep, for example. That we have reflective consciousness radically impacts upon our natural drives and instincts, just as our material form is the condition of possibility of consciousness itself. In this sense we are a symbiotic totality. On the other hand we are at the top of a hierarchy of self-consciousness, which, perhaps, descends through primates and dolphins to amoebas. There is a hierarchy of different totalities.

Hegel, however, adds a new element to this picture from Kantian idealism, that of consciousness requiring a constant struggle to extricate itself from nature. Reason requires a self-sufficiency of thinking, which involves separating oneself off from ones inclinations and desires. As Taylor argues:

The thinking rational subject can only exist as embodied. In this sense we can truly say that the subject *is* his embodiment...And yet at the same time this embodiment in life has a tendency to carry us along the stream of inclination, of impulse towards unreflecting unity within ourselves and with nature. Reason has to struggle against this in order to realise itself. And in this sense his embodiment is not only other than the thinking rational subject, but in a sense his opposite, his limit, his opponent.⁴⁷

3) The Supra-Individual Nature of Subjectivity

Hegel attempts to resolve this conflict in appealing to a wider, rational plan underlying nature. Humans have to be conceived not as separate finite units but of vehicles of infinite *Spirit*. By understanding themselves in this way they are

⁴⁷ Taylor (1975) p. 83.

reconciled with the external world, their own nature, and their community. Individuals, therefore, have to cultivate their own nature to tune it to the demands of reason, on the basis of understanding themselves as the embodiment of infinite *Spirit*. Simultaneously, they must preserve the consciousness of the division that set in motion the demand for reconciliation in the first place, as it is only through the collapse of the original unity and the emergence of subjectivity that the terms of such reconciliation could be established.

This conception of subjectivity can be seen in opposition to that of Kant. In Kant, the content or material synthesized by the subject is always viewed as external to the subject itself.⁴⁸ The subject is seen as ordering or subsuming an external sensuous manifold. For Hegel, the Idea (as we shall see) is constitutive of content itself. That subject is constitutive or creative of the underlying structure of reality entails that it is necessarily supra individual. However, as I will argue, rather than identify this supra-individual subject with the collective activity of flesh-and-blood human beings, as is the case in the Marxist tradition, *Spirit*, for Hegel, is an autonomous source of content. Before dealing more thoroughly with the notion of *Spirit* I want to, firstly, give a brief genealogical account of the evolution of the concept in terms of some of Hegel's broader concerns. To this end, I will briefly examine Hegel's work on love, his organicist *naturphilosophie*, and his religious thought in order to place the idea of *Spirit* in a broader context. In all these cases, *Spirit* can be understood as a philosophical response to the problem of alienation, as a form of reconciliation between man and man, man and nature and man and God.

⁴⁸ Kant (1969) p. 51.

3.1) Some Background Themes

3.1.1) Love

In the '*Spirit of Christianity*', Hegel describes love in terms of 'pure subject-object identity'.⁴⁹ In loving someone, one loses something of oneself in committing to the other, only to find oneself as part of a greater whole. Furthermore, although love involves a kind of abandonment to the other, it also involves a kind of mutual recognition,⁵⁰ a recognition of the independence of each partner. What is thus gained by such abandonment is a rediscovery of oneself through the other and a form of recognition of independence.

Hegel takes this to be archetypal for his idea of freedom as reconciliation.⁵¹ As we shall see in Chapter Two, reconciliation involves a process in which the self ceases to define itself in opposition to others but, instead, comes to see itself as dependent upon a greater whole. The self sees this greater whole as constitutive of its identity and self-understanding rather than an external threat to its existence. It is clear that Hegel is thinking not only of love in its romantic form, but also in terms of Christian love for one's brethren. Hegel takes Christianity, understood highly idiosyncratically, to be key to motivating his contemporaries to reconcile themselves to the post-revolutionary world.

⁴⁹ Hegel, G. (1948) *Early Theological Writings* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago) p. 308.

⁵⁰ 'The family, as the immediate substantiality of mind, is specifically characterized by love, which is mind's feeling of its own unity. Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member' Hegel, G.W.F. (1991) p. 110.

⁵¹ '...terms that appear initially to be bound together are in fact not alien to one another; instead, they are moments of one whole each of which, being related to the other, is at home with itself, and goes together with itself.' Hegel (1991) p. 232. Also see Hegel (1969) p. 603.

There are, however, differences between the description of love in the *Spirit of Christianity* and the notion of reconciliation in Hegel's latter works, developed at the level of Hegel's metaphysics in the *Phenomenology* and *Logic* and at the political level in the *Philosophy of Right*. Firstly, the *Spirit of Christianity* is written at a time when Hegel's metaphysics takes an avowedly mystical turn. Love, at that point, is something that cannot be grasped discursively. As a mysterious and ideal form of reconciliation, it cannot be comprehended by the (Kantian) Understanding, which divides and analyses. In later works,⁵² whilst maintaining that love cannot be grasped by the Understanding, Hegel argues that it can be grasped by the faculty of Reason, which transcends the limitations of the Understanding. Secondly, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel abandons his description of love as a relationship of equality, instead arguing that men are calculating and rational whereas women are intuitive and impulsive and hence not on an equal footing.⁵³ Thirdly, Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, demotes the importance of love to its role in the family. Love, here, is seen as an inchoate form of reconciliation, expressed more self-consciously through the notion of mutual recognition which is inscribed into the roles and interrelation of subjects in ethical life.⁵⁴ Despite these changes, however, the 'gain-through-submission' that is achieved in Love provides an important analogy for Hegel's broader concern

⁵² See, for example, Hegel, (1991) p. 26-7.

⁵³ '...[M]an has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world....Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind.' Hegel (1991) p. 114.

⁵⁴ Note that the discussion of love in the *Philosophy of Right* is confined to the section on family life. Hegel (1991) pp. 199-208. In an addition to 158, Hegel differentiates between conscious unity (in the state) and unity based on feeling (in the family) p. 199.

with reconciliation and provides some initial indicators as to what the notion of *Spirit* may amount to. Freedom, for Hegel, is realised only in understanding oneself as being part of a larger entity, as vehicles of *Spirit*.

3.1.2) Organicism

Another important strand of influence upon Hegel's notion of *Spirit* is the organicist tradition, which was of great significance as a movement against mechanism in the late 18th century, and absorbed by romantic thinkers such as Novalis, Schelling and Hölderlin.⁵⁵ Organicism can be defined in terms of two main features. Firstly, whereas mechanism explains events only in terms of one body acting upon another, as an external chain of causality, organicism takes cause and effect to be internally related. Hence, organicism takes living beings to be self-organising and self-generating. Furthermore, organisms develop in accordance with their formal-final cause i.e. they are structured teleologically. Secondly, the adoption of the Aristotelian notion of a formal-final cause means that an organism has to be understood as a *totum*, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, rather than a *compositum*, in which the parts precede the whole. The whole is not reducible to its embodiments but is their foundation, source and substance. Beiser⁵⁶ qualifies this distinction in an important respect by arguing that, for Hegel, the whole is only prior in the order of explanation and

⁵⁵ For a good overview of German Romanticism see Beiser, F. (2003) *The Romantic Imperative* (Harvard, Cambridge), Beiser, F. (1996) *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (CUP, Cambridge). For opposing accounts of Hegel's affiliation with romanticism see Pinkhard (2000) *Hegel: A Biography* (CUP, Cambridge) p. 77 and Beiser (2005) p34-6. For a sympathetic account of Hegel's naturphilosophie see Houlgate, S. (1998) *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature* (Sunny Press, Albany).

⁵⁶ Beiser (2005), p56-7

not existence. To determine what a thing is we understand it in terms of universals, in order to define its nature or essence. Such an essence or purpose only comes into existence, however, through the immanent development of the thing.

It should be obvious why this holistic way of thinking would have appealed to Hegel, whose main concern is the estrangement of man from nature and man from man. Organicism conceives of all living things as internally structured organisms and, moreover, conceives of the natural world as a whole (including human beings) as a complex organism. However, despite its appeal for Hegel, it was not a way of thinking that he adopted uncritically. Hegel was well aware of Kant's sceptical arguments against organicism in the *Critique of Judgement*⁵⁷ and made great efforts to distance himself from its extremes.⁵⁸ Firstly, Hegel did not think that ascribing a purpose to all living things meant ascribing intentionality. It is perfectly possible to ascribe a formal-final cause to an organism without assuming intention on its part. Secondly, Hegel rejected many of the animist or vitalist associations of organicism, for example, the idea of a supernatural force or agency running through nature. Most importantly, Hegel, unlike Schelling, resisted the naturalistic tendencies of organicism. Whilst he thought of human subjectivity as something arising through and within nature, Hegel emphasised those realms most associated with self-consciousness and reflection (politics, culture and art) as being the highest level of development and organization of nature. As I suggest in the section on necessity, Hegel takes such capacities for human freedom and self-reflection to be the highest stage in the organization and development of nature. However, he marries this prizing of subjectivity and

⁵⁷ Kant (1987) *Critique of Judgement* translated by W.S. Pluhar (Hackett, Indianapolis) § 64-5.

⁵⁸ See Beiser p. 95-103 for a detailed discussion of Kant's argument and Hegel's response.

freedom with an organicist conception of necessity, whereby such development inheres within the form of nature itself. Of central importance for Hegel is the potential that organicism offers in overcoming Kant's dualism of the noumenal and phenomenal realms. Whereas Kant distinguishes between the noumenal realm of reason and the phenomenal realm of cause and effect, or between the ideal and the empirical, the notion of organicism suggests that the ideal form is inherent in the matter itself.

Understanding Hegel's organicist world-view, therefore, can be seen to contribute two important dimensions to our understanding of the notion of *Spirit*. Firstly, *Spirit* must be understood as a complex organism in which individual moments are internally related to each other. Furthermore, the whole, upon which individual moments depend, is greater than the sum of its parts. Secondly, *Spirit* moves *teleologically* in accordance with its formal-final cause.

3.1.3) Religion

The final contributing factor to the development of Hegel's notion of *Spirit* which I want to examine is the religious dimension.⁵⁹ This is the area which is most problematic for those who want to develop non-metaphysical readings of Hegel.⁶⁰ I suggested above, that Hegel sees the Christian religion as an important vehicle for bringing about reconciliation between man and world. There is a certain amount of expediency in this belief, as it appears that this is only the case in the absence of there being any other major belief system in place capable of appealing to the heart and imagination of the Prussian masses. Hegel makes

⁵⁹61 See Beiser Ch 4, Stern pp190-194 and Pinkard pp 221-68 for a fuller discussion of Hegel's relationship to Christianity.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Patten (1999) p. 16-27.

many criticisms of Christianity in his writings, making one question whether there is anything Christian about his theological views at all. Firstly, he claims that the charitable imperatives of Christianity undermine property relations.⁶¹ Secondly, he argues that the teachings of Jesus require people to become followers or disciples rather than discover truth for themselves. It is Socrates, not Jesus, who is the better exemplar of morality.⁶² Thirdly, Hegel takes the Christian notion of *brethren* to be too exclusive to apply to the whole human race. Fourthly, for Hegel, Christians are archetypal of the 'beautiful soul',⁶³ preferring to abstain from getting their hands dirty and making difficult compromises and instead opting to condemn from above.

The most fundamental critique of Christianity, however, is of its idea of a transcendent God. Christianity can only conceive of the highest good as something beyond the world, outside and above the earthy city of disease and corruption. Indeed, rather than be a vehicle for reconciliation, Christianity has served as a vehicle for alienation, projecting notions of the good into a transcendent realm rather than endeavouring to create 'heaven on hearth'.⁶⁴ In contradistinction, Hegel's God is an immanent God, of which we finite individuals are all vehicles. For Hegel, we are all manifestations of God, literally his life function and expression. Charles Taylor, the most prominent metaphysical interpreter of Hegel, compares Hegel's conception of the universe

⁶¹ Hegel (1984) *The Berne Fragments in Three Essays* translated by P. Fuss and J. Dobbins (University of Notre Dame press, Notre Dame) p. 61-2.

⁶² Hegel (1971) p. 119-20.

⁶³ Hegel (1977) p. 383.

⁶⁴ Hegel (1977) pp. 294-364, see especially p. 364.

to a text in which God says what he is. God is nothing without the universe of finite entities and we, as the self-positing of God, are nothing without God.

As Taylor argues, this is because (for Hegel) God must assume a material existence.⁶⁵ It must be somewhere at sometime. Because finite *Spirits* are necessarily localised in space and time, there must be a multitude of finite *Spirits* in which God can exist. These must be living beings, as only living beings are capable of expressing themselves and thus capable of expressing God's existence. Moreover they must be rational animals, capable of the highest forms of expression, living against background of lower forms of life and inanimate nature, which are their foundation. Hegel argues that the existence of three levels, finite conscious *Spirits* (humans), finite *Spirits* without consciousness (animals) and pure externality (inanimate nature) provide the richest and most differentiated design of the universe possible, within which God can externalise itself.

Hegel's rather unorthodox Christian God brought forth many contemporary accusations of Pantheism.⁶⁶ As Beiser⁶⁷ contends, these accusations, whilst partially true, often missed the point. Hegel charges his accusers with not

⁶⁵ Taylor (1977) p. 90. See also Hegel (1998) § 505.

⁶⁶ Tony Smith, in response to John Rosenthal's 'Myth of Dialectics' tries to bring out some of the radical implications of such acosmism rather than decry Hegel's system as Christian Mysticism. 'The divine *Spirit* that is affirmed at the culmination of his Philosophy of religion turns out to be the *Spirit* that unifies a human community, a notion that unquestionably anticipates the discussion of Solidarity by radical liberation theologians' Smith (2002) p193. In rejecting the notion of a self-sufficient God, outside the world and denying a mystical, transcendental realm, which alone has truth, Hegel is fundamentally challenging Christian orthodoxy. This is especially radical, given the conditions of censorship employed in early nineteenth century Prussia.

⁶⁷ Acosmism is the disappearance of the finite in the infinite.

understanding what Pantheism means. Pantheism, for Hegel, (more precisely understood as *acosmism*⁶⁸) does not simply identify the divine with the totality of all living things. To simply identify a universal with a set of particulars is what Hegel calls an 'abstract universal'.⁶⁹ The pantheist, however, is making a more specific claim that, whilst God is not transcendent, neither is it merely the sum total of living things. Instead, it is the foundation, source and form of all finite beings, more than simply the sum of their parts. At this level, we can see a connection with Pantheist theology. However, in spite of this, Hegel does not take Pantheism to have adequately developed the principle of Subjectivity, a principle that is of such importance to his Philosophy. Hegel, as I have suggested, prizes those areas most associated with self-consciousness and subjectivity, for example, art, philosophy and religion, as being the highest forms of expression of god's existence. It is this concern with subjectivity that differentiates Hegel from pantheism. However, as I shall argue in the following sections, Hegel's attempts to reconcile this concern with human subjectivity with his metaphysics are deeply flawed from the standpoint of social constitution.

3.2) Substance and Subject

In his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel makes the claim 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not as substance, but equally as subject.'⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ See Hegel (1991) p. 102-3 for the distinction between abstract and concrete universality.

⁷⁰ Hegel (1977), p. 23.

By this, Hegel means that human experience is both self-conscious and self-constituting. However, we only understand it as such at the end of a process of development,

Of the absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end is it what it really is; and that precisely in this consists its nature viz. To be actual subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.⁷¹

The 'end' in question is the 'representation of the absolute as *Spirit*'.⁷² This consists in the realisation that everything we know and everything there is, is the creation of a self-determining subject-object. This point is attained through a journey whereby lower forms of consciousness discover (albeit without intention) that what they take to be knowledge is in fact flawed or inadequate, requiring the formation of more complex forms of knowledge. This is a process of *determinate negation*, the negation of a flawed or imperfect yet determinate content to give rise to a less flawed or less imperfect determinate content. Determinate negation contrasts with abstract negation in that it maps itself onto the contours of what it negates transforming a determinate object and not merely standing in an external relation to its content:

[S]uch a negation is not all negation but the negation of the determinate subject-matter which dissolves and is thus determinate negation, so that the form from which it results is essentially contained in the result.⁷³

Hegel employs a 'comparison of consciousness with itself', in that he relates the knowledge of the world available to a specific level of consciousness to its claims about what knowledge is itself. The inadequacy of the actual knowledge

⁷¹ Hegel (1977), p. 24.

⁷² Hegel (1977), p. 28.

⁷³ Hegel (1998) § 35.

of lower levels of consciousness is seen to result from an inadequate conception of what knowledge is. The process of progression of human knowledge is, therefore, both one of actual knowledge and the criterion of what counts as knowledge itself. Hegel's comparison of consciousness with itself takes place from the point of view of the completion of the system whereby we can claim that the development from lower to higher modes of consciousness is of necessity, that flaws in one level have entailed their resolution at a higher level. To the level of consciousness being described, however, such a movement has the appearance of externality or chance. As I have said, this process terminates in *Spirit's* knowledge of itself as underpinning everything. It comprehends that knowledge is not mere knowledge of an external world but the self-understanding of *Spirit*.

A number of key points should be apparent from this preliminary account. Firstly, through this characterisation of the developmental nature of *Spirit*, Beiser's distinction between the universal as first in the order of explanation and first in the order of existence should be clearer (see above). From the point of view of the absolute, we come to understand all previous shapes of *Spirit* as inchoate forms of its articulation. Moreover, such shapes come to be seen as necessary stages in the development of the absolute, the diremptions of subject and object, immanence and transcendence and real and empirical being necessary to the self-realisation of *Spirit*. However, from the point of view of existence, *Spirit* begins as Substance, innate and not conscious of itself.

Secondly, whereas Hegel seeks to understand the distinctions that unfold in the development of *Spirit*, as expressed in, for example, Descartes mind-body dualism or Kant's noumena-phenomena distinction, he is also a radically anti-

dualist thinker in that his aim is to both explain and surmount such divisions. Hegel conceives as both subject and object as essentially having the same structure. *Begrif* (or the concept) is the name Hegel gives to both the inherent form of all reality and the structure reason must assume in order to comprehend reality. In order for an object to be intelligible, reason must be structured in terms of the rational concept. This is because the structure of the rational concept is also that of reality as a whole.

Finally, to paint this picture presented in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, into the theological argument above, the development of *Spirit* corresponds to the realisation that we are in fact vehicles of the infinite *Spirit*. For Taylor, this involves a constellation of self-awareness, freedom and reason. *Spirit* is made determinate, or expressed through finite *Spirits*. It teleologically progresses towards more and more adequate expressions of itself whereby eventually finite *Spirits* recognise that the structure of the universe is as it is so *Spirit* can be. It becomes 'self-knowledge of a universal *Spirit* of which we have become the vehicles'.⁷⁴

Having given this preliminary account of *Spirit* I want to move on to look at some key issues in more detail. These are, firstly, the strength of the notion of necessity underlying *Spirit's* existence and development, secondly, the extent to which his system is intelligible to those standing outside it and, thirdly, the retrospective character of Hegel's thinking. Finally I want to deal with some of the arguments surrounding whether Hegel can be made intelligible without some

⁷⁴ Taylor, (1977) p. 90. '[I]n coming to self-awareness, *Spirit* has also come to its fullest self-expression, hence freedom. It has shaped its vehicle to a perfect expression of itself. And since the essence of that vehicle, man, is to be the vehicle of *Spirit*, he too knows himself as fully self-expressed i.e. free' Taylor (1977) p. 92.

of his more bizarre metaphysical claims. On all these points, as I have indicated, I want highlight the gap between Hegel's metaphysics and the notion of social constitution in order to raise the stakes for Adorno's critical appropriation of Hegel. As I will argue in more detail, I take both Hegel and Adorno to have started from a similar problem, alienation, focusing on the conflicts between man and both external and internal nature and between individual and community. If, as I have suggested, Hegel's account of *Spirit* is irredeemably bound up with his mysticism, there are obvious difficulties in Adorno appropriating the Hegelian language of reconciliation. If what is doing the work, for Hegel, in terms of healing such wounds is a mystical meta-subject, *Spirit*, then we must ask what Adorno has to offer in its place. We must ask whether there is a way of appropriating Hegelian categories in a way which is consistent with the materialist insistence that flesh-and-blood human beings are the sole authors of history. Whether or not Adorno succeeds in extirpating the rational kernel from the mystical shell is the subject of Chapter Three.

3.3) Rational Necessity

It is fundamental to Hegel's system that developments in *Spirit* be characterised as having come about of necessity. Necessity, in Hegel, could be understood in two main senses. Firstly, Hegel's account of history could be taken as describing developments that are necessary in the looser sense of being the best or most plausible course history could have taken. This could apply, for example, to Chapter Six of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which roughly follows human history from ancient Greece to the French Revolution.⁷⁵ The movement

⁷⁵ Although Hegel often makes far stronger claims in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 'It is only an inference from the history of the world, that its development has been a rational process; that the history in question has constituted the rational necessary course of the world-

underlying the development from lower to higher levels of consciousness is experienced as external or accidental by the participants in *Spirit's* self-realisation. Only for those at the end point of this process, can it be seen as necessarily having unfolded in this way. Secondly, necessity can be seen as referring to ontological facts, that, for example, finite entities exist necessarily as mediated through the whole. In this sense, the structure of the Logic can be seen to be elucidating the ontological structures of meaning.

Some, like Paul Franco, attempt to minimise the significance of the notion of necessity in Hegel's thought, particularly to his social, political and historical thought.⁷⁶ Furthermore, according to this view, it is mistaken to think of *reason alone* generating content which rational individuals must accommodate themselves to.⁷⁷ Findlay's forward to the *Phenomenology* makes similar claims to Franco, arguing that necessity refers only to the most plausible route that the development of *Spirit* could have taken and not the *only* route.⁷⁸ Findlay claims *Spirit* – that *Spirit* whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this one nature in the phenomena of the worlds existence' Hegel (1975) *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* translated by H.B. Nisbert (CUP, Cambridge) p. 10. Such lecture notes were compiled by Hegel's students and their authenticity is disputed.

⁷⁶ 'Distinguishing between the stronger claim that Hegels dialectical progressions constitute the only possible resolutions to the internal contradictions of previous forms of consciousness and the weaker claim that they represent the best possible resolutions so far, I think all that is important about Hegels general approach can be defended on the latter' Franco (1999) p. 86.

⁷⁷ 'While it is true that Hegel does, at some level, identify freedom with rational necessity, he does not see this necessity as a kind of fact that first exists outside of human freedom and only later comes to lose its alien character by being understood' Franco (1999) p. 181.

⁷⁸ 'There is no reason to think that Hegel thought that the path traced in the *Phenomenology*, through consisting throughout of necessary steps, was the only path that the conscious *Spirit* could have taken in rising from sensuous immediacy to absolute knowledge' Hegel (1977) p. ii.

that Hegel's dialectic is far subtler than a mechanism that merely pursues a set rational course. Hegel recognised that even mathematics could arrive at proofs through a number of different paths and certainly saw his own logic as a higher and more comprehensive expression of consciousness.⁷⁹ Likewise, Kaufman claims that, for Hegel, necessity is an antonym for arbitrariness. If something happens out of necessity, what Hegel really means is that it happens for good reasons and not randomly or by chance.⁸⁰

However, such interpretations can be found wanting in many respects. Firstly, for example, Findlay argues in his preface to the *Phenomenology*, that Hegel allows for there being much that is contingent in history. However, whilst this is true⁸¹, it does not necessarily contradict with a strong notion of rational necessity. The basic direction of history, the basic structure of the universe and the progression of levels of consciousness all unfold according to rational necessity. There are elements of contingency in the world, however, but elements, which exist of necessity. The world *necessarily* contains different levels of being, the higher levels perfectly manifesting the necessity underlying them with the lower levels doing so only imperfectly and manifesting elements of contingency.⁸²

⁷⁹ Hegel (1998) p. 202-4.

⁸⁰ Kaufman (1966) *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson) p. 85.

⁸¹ Findlay in Hegel (1977) p. ii. See Hegel (1991) p. 217-218 for Hegel's discussion of contingency in nature. Hegel's discussion here could either be taken as an admission of the problem of natural contingency or of an admission of the limits of philosophical deduction. The latter appears to be a more plausible reading. That the philosopher cannot deduce the number of species of parrot, for example, from absolute necessity is not reason for Hegel to deny that a particular number of parrot species exists of necessity.

⁸² See for example Hegel (1977) *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (SUNY Press, Albany) p. 91.

Furthermore such a loose notion of necessity fails to grasp Hegel's project of reconciliation seriously. The object of Hegel's philosophy is the reconciliation of man to the world. This requires that mankind understand that the modern world has developed the objective capacity to be a home not just for 'good' or 'plausible' reasons but as a consequence of rational necessity. It is this recognition, that the modern world is the way it is as the consequence of a necessary process of development, which gives weight to the demand for reconciliation. Hegel frequently identifies reconciliation with the recognition of rational necessity.⁸³ To give a famous example:

To recognise reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to delight in the present – this rational insight is the *reconciliation* with actuality which philosophy grants to those who have received the inner call to comprehend.⁸⁴

The notion of necessity is also deeply entwined with Hegel's conception of freedom. The level of freedom one obtains through recognising oneself as a vehicle of *Spirit* is infinitely greater than that one can realise as a finite *Spirit*. The reason for this is that, as finite *Spirits*, much of what we are is given by nature. Taylor claims that we are expressive beings yet much of what we do must be understood in terms of life functions (digestion, procreation etc.) and even those activities that are expressive should be seen as very much conditioned by our animality.⁸⁵ Here, I take it that Taylor is claiming that the Aristotelian and Expressivist notions of the subject cannot be reconciled exactly in relation to

⁸³ It is indeed debatable whether or not the Hegelian needs to make such strong claims – an issue I will examine in terms of its political implications in Chapter Two. However, for the moment, the use of the notion of rational necessity in grounding a notion of reconciliation can be seen as what makes the project for finding a 'home' in the world distinctly Hegelian.

⁸⁴ Hegel (1991) p. 22.

⁸⁵ Taylor (1977) p. 89-91

finite *Spirits*, only in relation to *Spirit*. The point is, therefore, that there is a certain givenness that cannot be transcended by the finite *Spirit* conceived as such. *Spirit*, however, posits its own embodiment. Its externalisation in the universe is both the expression and condition of its possibility. Hence there is no givenness. *Spirit* is entirely determined by itself.

This radical freedom achieved by *Spirit* is intrinsically bound to its following rational necessity. That is, *Spirit* follows *reason* alone and in following a line of rational necessity it comes to be driven by nothing outside reason, or nothing given. As Taylor argues:

If one had a line of action which was grounded entirely on rational, conceptual necessity, without reposing on any merely given premises, then we would have a pure expression of subjectivity as reason, one in which *Spirit* would recognise itself as expressed, and hence free, in a total unadulterated way; something immeasurably greater than the freedom of finite *Spirits*.⁸⁶

However, there is still one given that has to underlie this argument, that *Spirit* be or that *Spirit* realise itself. As Raymond Geuss argues, this is the only imperative that can be obtained from Hegel's philosophy and even, as such, it is radically impersonal and not directed at anything anyone could conceivably do. Is it still a *given* though? Taylor claims it is not; as to claim that *Spirit* should 'be' is not a limit on its freedom but the very basis of freedom itself. That *Spirit* 'be' is the very foundation of the possibility of freedom, everything else follows from this point by rational necessity undetermined by anything outside reason. Furthermore, that reason is the vehicle for subjectivity follows from its very nature. Free subjectivity can only be realised through clear, discursive,

⁸⁶ Geuss (2003) 'Outside Ethics', *European Journal of Philosophy* (Volume 11, Number 1), p. 93.

conceptual thought as only then can *Spirit* accurately grasp itself as both substance and subject.

I suggested that the requirement that '*Spirit* be' is the only presupposition underlying *Spirit's* development of rational necessity. However, Hegel still has to prove this presupposition. He has to show that if we look at the structure of the world, it could be no other way than a manifestation of Gods self-realisation. Hegel is not arguing that, because the world appears to have properties that have been the creation of a designer it is most probable that they are the manifestation of God. Instead, Hegel demonstrates his point through dialectical argument, by seeing contradiction in all finite things that point towards having to understand them as moments of a wider reality. We climb through various inadequate forms of relating consciousness to its objects until we reach knowledge of *Spirit* as positing the world as its necessary embodiment. At this point, all the previous contradictions and antagonisms through which *Spirit* gained self-realisation are preserved within a differentiated unity. *Spirit* both knows itself fully and knows how it arrived at its self-realisation.

The ontological necessity described by Hegel posits finite identities as having a necessary relationship to something else and ultimately the whole. We can see this dialectic operating throughout Hegel's thinking, for example, in the claim that everything immediate is (on closer examination) mediated.⁸⁷ Likewise, the

⁸⁷87 ...[I]t is quite mindless not to see that the unity of distinct determinations is not just a purely immediate...unity but that what is posited in it is precisely that one of the determinations has truth only through its mediation by the other; or, in other words, that each of them is mediated with the truth only through the other. Hegel (1991) p. 70.

⁸⁸88 Spinoza was radically deterministic, claiming that all human actions and thoughts are modes of the divine nature. See Beiser (2005) pp. 71-5 for a good discussion of Hegel's relationship to

notion that the true infinity is *self-related* or circular rather than an infinitely extending sequence of finite entities can be seen to extend from this principle. The idea that things cannot exist on their own because they are contradictory and, hence, must pass over into something else, is raised to an ontological principle.

This strong notion of necessity makes Hegel's concept of freedom appear rather counter intuitive. In the face of the then dominant Kantian-Fichtean notion of autonomy, with its emphasis on choice and subjectivity, does Hegel not represent a move back to Spinoza?⁸⁸ Are we not left with a system of thinking that is both radically deterministic and quietist (in that nothing human beings do can alter the path of human history)? Like the romantics, Hegel was very much attracted to the idealist notion of freedom in Fichte but was also attracted to Spinoza's naturalism in that it did not posit a distinction between an empirical and transcendent realm or between noumena and phenomena. It was precisely such dualisms, so integral to the Kantian-Fichtean concept of autonomy, that Hegel wanted to supersede. However, he wanted to do so in a form that rescued something of the *Spirit* of the idealist notion of freedom. To 'square the circle', Hegel claims human subjectivity to be the highest development of the powers of nature.⁸⁹ Those realms most closely connected with human subjectivity, culture, politics, art and Christianity, are prized as the highest realizations of reason in

Spinoza.

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⁸⁹ These are the areas Hegel associates with 'Absolute *Spirit*', namely art, religion and philosophy (see Hegel (1998) § 553) These are the areas in which individuals are most conscious of God's existence.

history. However, they are so of necessity, coming to the fore at the moment of *Spirit's* self-realisation i.e. its *telos*.

3.4) The Retrospective Character of Philosophy

A further respect in which Hegel can be seen to avoid the quietist implications of Spinoza's theology is in that God's self-realisation, for Hegel, is achieved only through the subjective self-realisation of finite beings. *God is as dependant upon human activity as finite human beings are dependent upon God.*⁹⁰ What sort of subject can this be, however, if it comprehends what it has done only in retrospect? Hegel's notion of the subject seems far removed from that of the Fichtean who shapes his path in accordance with his choices. Hegel's notion of subjectivity can in fact be separated both from individualist liberal models of the subject and the idea of constitutive subjectivity in the critical tradition.⁹¹ The former, crudely understood, tends towards understanding individuals as a culmination of their choices, holding them responsible for the life decisions they have made for themselves. Whereas Hegel tends to ascribe such a self-understanding to modern individuals, the strong notion of unintended consequences expressed through the 'cunning of reason' seems to undercut such a notion (see below). Hegel shares the radical historicism of the latter, taking all human beliefs and practices to derive solely from their cultural and social context. However he also subscribes to a strong notion of historical determinism, echoing Kant, Schelling, and Herder before him and influencing many Marxists after him. Hegel was opposed to any form of historical relativism, seeing History

⁹⁰ Hegel (1998) § 505.

⁹¹ For a basic account of the Marxist account of subjectivity and historical progress see Callinicos, A. (1983) p. 82-105.

as corresponding to rational laws of progress.⁹² Not only does such faith appear naïve in the light of the 20th century, such determinism places Hegel in opposition to the unity of theory and practice in the critical tradition, which requires that people be understood as being able to practically and collectively transform the world and to re-interpret themselves and the world they inhabit through such transformation. In contradistinction, Hegel's notion of *Spirit* is radically impersonal, involving a radical separation of theory and practice, whereby the Owl of Minerva flies only at the fall of dusk, once *Spirit* has culminated in its own self-realisation.⁹³

Hegel describes this unintended evolution of history on a rational path in terms of one his most controversial ideas, 'the cunning of reason'. This idea originated in the populist 'Lectures on the Philosophy of History', authored not by Hegel but by his students. As such, its significance should be treated with scepticism.⁹⁴ The doctrine states that human beings essentially act out of *self-interest*. In Hegel's words: '[T]here is no room in reality for empty notions like that of pursuing goodness for its own sake.'⁹⁵

⁹² Hegel (1975) p. 10.

⁹³ Hegel (1991) p. 13.

⁹⁴ The lectures, because they are the most readable of Hegel's texts, have become the most popular entry point into Hegel's thinking. Although their authenticity is questionable, as they are compiled from fragments of lecture notes, a number of scholarly defences have been made of their central claims. See, for example, McCarney, J.(2000) *Hegel on History* (London, Routledge). I take the view that, however important the lectures are in terms of their legacy and, more importantly, the reaction against them, it is difficult to view the idealist notions of 'reason in history' and 'the cunning of reason' as anything but obscure historical relics.

⁹⁹ Hegel (1975) p. 84.

Furthermore, we always act as if we believe our actions to be freely determined, by doing what we please. Our actions, however, without our purposeful intention, contribute to the rational unfolding of history. However much we think we are acting selfishly, indifferent to moral ideals, we are always pawns in history's rational plan. 'The cunning of reason' is supposed to be Hegel's answer to the objection that, for him to hold such a teleological account of history, he would have to assume a rather naïve view of human agency as guided by the ideals of freedom and morality. If the 'cunning of reason' thesis holds, one can maintain a progressive account of human history, without resorting to an idealistic account of the moral motivation of historical actors. Furthermore, to return to the question of the association of a strong concept of necessity with both determinism and quietism, the 'cunning of reason' thesis appears to include the demand (1) that the agency of human beings is essential to historical progress and (2) that human beings understand their actions as freely determined. Both demands are reconciled with a strongly rationalistic and teleological account of historical progress.

Given this separation between individuals' own self-understanding of their actions and the designs of reason, Hegel's ethics seem radically impersonal. From the standpoint of the absolute, that is from the point of view of the Hegelian, the key ethical question of 'what ought I to do' seems to become

⁹⁵100 Geuss (2003) p. 35. The account of ethics implied by the notion of the cunning of reason is very different from that presented in the *Philosophy of Right*. In the *Philosophy of Right*, it does matter to Hegel that people do the right thing for the right reasons and that they can make such reasons intelligible to themselves and others. It is also important that people act on the right sort of inclination and desire for each reason, for example that marriage is undertaken on the basis of love. Hegel (1991) pp. 199-208.

largely sidelined. It becomes difficult to ascribe any intentionality to any agent, irrespective of how they phenomenologically perceive the situation. This can be addressed more clearly by examining what Hegel describes as the 'objective' and 'subjective' conditions for *Spirit's* self-realisation.

When we talk about the reconciliation that marks the end point of *Spirit's* self-realisation we are talking about something 'objective' in the sense that the world must be *this* way for it to accommodate *Spirit*. As we shall see in the next section, the objective conditions of freedom are those in which *Spirit* can find a home. It is referred to as 'objective' precisely, as I have said, because it is not the outcome of subjective intentions, as something intentionally 'brought about' by any individual or group of individuals. As Raymond Geuss argues, Spartacus would not himself have been able to end ancient slavery even if he had intended to that (which, as far as we know, he did not), nor could indeed all the slaves in the ancient world, acting together, have put an end once and for all to the conditions of slavery unless the historical conditions were right.⁹⁶

When Hegel refers to the subjective conditions of reconciliation, that we subjectively feel at home in the world, again this is *not* because we see ourselves as having intentionally got there. So, to return to the slavery example, we understand, from the standpoint of the absolute, that the overthrow of slavery was necessary in the course of developing a world in which *Spirit* can find a home but do not see the process of its overthrow as being anything intentional, anything that could be attributed to a 'real, determinate, practically effective historical agent, who existed in the time in question'.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ Geuss (2003) p. 35.

In these circumstances, as I have said, the implications of Hegel's philosophy become very different to those which assume intentionality of some sort. The imperative 'let *Spirit* realise itself' cannot be predicated to any individual or group of individuals. Just as no individual or group can abolish ancient slavery, no individual can 'realise *Spirit*'. It is something that happens as the result of a gradual, unintended process.

3.5) The Intelligibility of Hegel's System - Rosen's Critique

Given this description of the movement of *Spirit*, a further question is raised as to how one comes to gain knowledge of the absolute. It has long been the retort of the Hegelian that those who criticise aspects of his thinking fail to understand the whole on which it is premised. This has provided Hegel and his followers with an opportunity to side-step rational criticism of his system on the basis that the critic stands outside the holistic, organic view of he who has come to gain knowledge of the absolute. Michael Rosen's starting point is precisely that Hegel's dialectic is closed to rational criticism. As his interpretation of Hegel will be important in deciphering Adorno's dialectic in Chapter Three, it is worth turning to some of the issues he raises.

Rosen invokes the 'post festum paradox', which he defines as follows. Truth, for Hegel, requires a system and can only be understood at the point of completion of this system.

'The true is the whole. But the whole is only the essence which completes itself through its development. It is to be said of the Absolute that it is essentially result, that only at the end is it that which it is in truth'.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Hegel (1977) p. 21.

Critics, however, should be interested in whether the individual arguments that Hegel advances to get to the point of completion hold or not. Rosen's key example is that of the issue of determinate negation, whereby Hegel claims that to negate determinate content yields a positive result. Hegel's method of philosophical critique, for example, is driven forward through challenging the incompleteness of previous philosophical theories. This argument is claimed to be false in that (as Karl Popper argues in 'What is Dialectic?')⁹⁹ Refutation can have a significant role in producing better theories but it does not have a *logical* role. Negation does not of logical *necessity* deliver positive results. Furthermore, the procedure of immanent critique, that is the negation of specific content within its own parameters, cannot itself be justified on the basis of immanent critique. The procedure of immanent critique is often invoked as a means of side-stepping the need for transcendental justification. However, the procedure itself requires justification that cannot logically fall back on the notion of immanent critique itself. For Hegel, however, to criticise such arguments in isolation from the system is to fail to acknowledge Hegel's insistence upon truth as a totality.

...to criticise from any point other than the point of completion violates a crucial presupposition of the system itself, namely that only someone who has really attained its final point can perceive the rationality of its attainment.¹⁰⁰

Rosen's answer to this paradox is precisely to deny that Hegel holds a universal and presuppositionless conception of rationality. What he does, instead, is to develop an *experiential basis* for his system through which his claims become intelligible. Through this mode of philosophical experience, Pure Thought, the

⁹⁹ Popper, K. (1940) 'What is Dialectic?' *Mind* (No. 49) pp. 403-26.

¹⁰⁰ Rosen (1982) p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Rosen (1982) p. 179.

claims of Hegel's system make sense. Instead of *describing* his system as to make it intelligible, Hegel presupposes *acquaintance* with it, an ability to practically engage with and participate within its rules and structures. Hence, it only makes sense to those within it and remains mystical to those outside. As a parallel example we could think of the moral sceptic standing outside the moral point of view, unable to engage unless she adopted something of the assumptions and argumentative procedure entailed in ascertaining moral truths. In Hegel's case, however, the experiential basis appears far more obscure, the experience of Pure Thought. This is the 'neo-platonic fantasy' alluded to above.¹⁰¹

In defining Hegel's approach as neo-platonic, Rosen cannot be referring to Hegel's ontology. The neo-platonic metaphor that God exists as a pool or source, separated from the world by high-reaching waterfalls could not be further from Hegel's radically unorthodox Christianity. However, Rosen is, I think, right that that Hegel's system requires access to some level of experience out with that of ordinary practical engagement with the world in order to be intelligible. He is also right to worry that any attempt to try to rehabilitate Hegel by taking away the rational claims away from their mystical context (for example Adorno) fails to recognise that all Hegel's claims derive from this mystical notion of experience. Given that I want to argue that both Hegel and Adorno share a common understanding of immanent critique, this is problematic. However, in Chapters Three and Four, I argue that this is not ultimately debilitating for Adorno. Firstly, I present a more modest notion of immanent critique, which does not rely upon a strong notion of rational necessity. Secondly, although I reject such a strong notion of necessity, I argue that often moves too far in rejecting certain features of Hegel's understanding of negation.

¹⁰¹102 Franco (1999) p. 84.

The picture of Hegel's system which I have presented so far is one which highlights the risks of Adorno's appropriation of Hegelian categories for materialist purposes. For many Hegel interpreters, one can extirpate the mysticism from Hegel's system simply by substituting '*Spirit*' for 'society' or 'social relations'. The claim is not that Hegel did not hold decidedly mystical views about God, only that his notion of *Spirit* is equally intelligible as a notion of human inter-subjectivity in general. I do not deal with the Marxist claim that Hegel fails to decipher the true origin of *Spirit* in social labour and thus *really* refers to social processes albeit in a mystical form. This is Adorno's more complex interpretative claim, which I deal with in Chapter Three. I, instead, have in mind Franco's claim that 'it is not necessary to import into this concept [*Spirit*] any dubious metaphysical or cosmic connotations'¹⁰² or Patten's claim that Hegel's mystic theology is inessential to the key arguments he makes. I want to argue that such an interpretation is fundamentally mistaken and that his system is intrinsically bound up with 'dubious metaphysical or cosmic connotations'.

Patten's critique of Taylor¹⁰³ in this respect makes a number of claims, of which I will deal with just two. His underlying concern is that there are many important elements to Hegel's philosophy which do not fit into the cosmic or metaphysical picture and that can be supported outside it. Firstly, Patten argues that *Spirit* refers to a number of different entities, individuals, peoples (*Volksgeist*) and the cosmic *Spirit* (*Weltgeist*). Some uses carry metaphysical connotations and some don't. Secondly, Patten claims that the argument that we are vehicles of God does little work in-itself in generating the content of

¹⁰²107 Patten (1999) p. 16-27.

¹⁰³

many of Hegel's claims. So, for example, it is unclear why Hegel should believe that specifically modern *Sittlichkeit* should be the most appropriate mode of God's self-realisation and not any other form of community or indeed why he believes that we need a community at all. God is not important in raising the specific claims Hegel makes. On one level Patten is right, many aspects of Hegel's political philosophy, for example, can be justified without appeal to Hegel's system. In the next chapter I look more closely at whether Hegel's understanding of freedom in his political philosophy needs to be predicated on such a metaphysical basis. For the moment I will make a few tentative suggestions. Firstly, in terms of Hegel's self-understanding, it seems undeniable that these various shapes of *Spirit* are all mediated through each other and that the highest level of mediation is the *Weltgeist*. The lower levels of *Spirit* are essential to the differentiation and self-realisation of God and whilst their cosmic status is not always explicit, it is presupposed in the underlying framework of Hegel's system. Secondly, it would appear that there is a theological underpinning for the content of modern *Sittlichkeit* in that a significant feature of the project is to accommodate the Christian notion of subjectivity. Whether this notion can be sustained on different grounds is debatable, but if Rosen is right, once we grasp precisely what Hegel means by subjectivity it is very difficult to separate it from its mystical shell. Finally, it seems difficult to take two of Hegel's notions, reconciliation and concrete universality, both of which do so much work in terms of Hegel's political philosophy, away from their place in the system. I examine both in more detail in the next chapter.

4) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the conflicts that Hegel takes the subject to be confronted with in modernity. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, I take Adorno to be also centrally preoccupied with such problems. At present, however, Hegel's solutions appear radically inadequate. The reading of *Spirit* I have presented in this chapter has been strongly metaphysical, drawing attention to its religious basis, the strong sense of necessity underlying its movement and the mystical notion of experience required to understand the *Absolute* from the inside. It is difficult to imagine, at this stage, how such claims are to be appropriated by Adorno, who was both atheist and radically anti-determinist. In further chapters, however, I will go on to broadly defend Adorno's understanding of dialectic and immanent critique, both of which can be seen to have firmly Hegelian roots. Before I do this, however, I want to look more closely at Hegel's political philosophy to see if he has anything more to offer in terms of responding to the problem of alienation. I will go on to argue that it is in the *Philosophy of Right* that Hegel provides his most interesting account of alienation and reconciliation. Indeed, I will argue that there is much in the *Philosophy of Right* to be appropriated by Marxists and critical theorists.

2) Freedom and Reconciliation in Hegel's Political Philosophy

1) Introduction

I suggested in the introduction that the notion of social constitution is not solely concerned with the explanation and understanding of social processes. It is also an ethical concept, offering a powerful critique of alienation. In Chapter One, I outlined the various ways in which the notion of *Spirit* underpins Hegel's metaphysical account of reconciliation, itself a response to the problem of alienation. I argued that this response is fatally flawed by Hegel's failure to understand *Spirit* as the collective activity of flesh-and-blood human beings, and instead treat it as an autonomous source of content. In this chapter, I move to consider Hegel's account of reconciliation in the realm of '*Objective Spirit*' (politics, jurisprudence and morality) as it is at this level that some of the ethical issues associated with the idea of reconciliation are articulated more clearly. More specifically, this chapter outlines Hegel's notion of reconciliation *qua* social autonomy and begins to examine the extent to which it is compromised both by Hegel's metaphysics and his politics.

Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right*, again equates freedom with self-determination, the property of being *self-related* or *being-with-oneself*. One can be said to be self-determined when one is dependent upon nothing outside oneself. Hegel's ontology, however, commits him to the view there can be nothing purely immediate, nothing which is not related to (or mediated through) anything else.¹⁰⁴ Hence, Hegel formulates freedom as the property of *being-with-*

¹⁰⁴ Hegel (1991) p. 70.

oneself-in-an-other.¹⁰⁵ In realising self-determination, one no longer sees social institutions or society in general as a restriction upon or interference in ones freedom. We have already seen an inchoate form of such reconciliation in the notion of Love in Hegel's early writing. Furthermore, we have already seen that in comprehending oneself as a vehicle of infinite *Spirit*, Hegel believes that we can begin to resolve the diremption of man from his world and man from his own natural being. What appear to be individual dilemmas or conflicts are uprooted in their wider contextualisation. His understanding of freedom in the *Philosophy of Right* continues in this trajectory, rooting freedom in a rational social order that not only facilitates our freedom but also *constitutes* us as free, self-determining beings. Against its negative, Hobbesian, formulation, Hegelian freedom is not an arena in which man can exercise its will freely without the interference of any power, 'being able to do as one pleases'.¹⁰⁶ Instead it is the *negation of the otherness* of such constraints. For Hegel, this requires a shift in consciousness, or a change in the way in which we relate to and practically engage in the world. It also requires the development of objectively rational, freedom-promoting institutions, institutions that Hegel believed had come to the fore in post-revolutionary Europe. These two conditions can be described as *subjective* and *objective* freedom respectively.

As I have said, the focus of this chapter is 'practical freedom'. Unlike speculative freedom, which is essentially about our cognitive relation to the world and gained in philosophical activity, practical freedom is concerned primarily with the will and its real engagement in the external world. What I want to look at, firstly, is the subjective faculties Hegel associates with Freedom.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel (1991) pp. 54-55.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel (1991) p. 48

There is much discussion as to whether Hegel's notion of freedom is close to a Kantian-Fichtean notion of autonomy or whether he develops a less oppositional understanding of the relationship between reason and inclination.¹⁰⁷ I develop the latter interpretation in order to draw connections with Adorno's understanding of the reconciliation of discursive reason and impulse and desire. A second, related issue is the extent to which Hegel's notion of freedom is conducive to social criticism or moral reflection. Whereas I take Hegel to be requiring that agents subjectively and reflectively endorse the rationality of ethical life, I take Hegel to be claiming that the day-to-day operation of our morality is unreflective and spontaneous. Rather than take this as a limitation of Hegel's political philosophy, I take this to be an important contribution to the question of moral motivation. That it is the nature of the social relations within which agents operate that is formative of one's ethical disposition is a claim that Marxists also want to make. Such a disposition is to become a 'second nature' to the individual. A third issue is the counter-intuitive idea that freedom, for Hegel, requires identity with social institutions whereby such institutions (or more precisely our roles within them) are seen as an antecedent condition for one's self-understandings and sense of self-worth. In attempting to ground this claim, I will discuss Hegel's notion of mutual recognition and the role of social institutions in nurturing and sustaining its development. I take the demand for mutual recognition to be at the ethical core of Hegel's thinking. Finally, it is necessary to understand what Hegel means by objective freedom, the rational institutions which constitute us as free agents. It is not my intention to discuss the detailed constitutional plan that Hegel advances in the *Philosophy of Right*. This section shall focus, firstly on the

¹⁰⁷ For example, see Patten, A. (1999) pp. 47-8 for the former view and Pinkard (2000) p. 473 for the latter.

requirement that a rational social order correspond to the rational concept. Secondly, I shall examine the formative role of social institutions in nurturing capacities for freedom, giving some illustrative examples from Hegel's discussion of the family, civil society and the state. Again, what I find most interesting in this account is the relationship between *Bildung* and the ethical disposition of agents in Hegel's account of social autonomy.

2) The Free Will

2.1) Three Determinations of the Will - Natural, Arbitrary and Rational

Before being able to progress towards some of the more difficult issues in relation to Hegel's understanding of freedom, it is necessary to first give an exposition of Hegel's concept of the free will and its three distinct forms, natural, arbitrary and rational. The introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* is dedicated to deriving a 'true' concept of the free will, one which will go on to inform his development of a rational social order that best promotes and engenders such freedom.

Hegel does not see the will as a separate faculty, which mediates between thinking and acting.¹⁰⁸ Instead he thinks of the will as a type of (practical) thinking concerned with translating our subjective aims and interests into existence in the world. It is essentially about externalising our ends and objectives.

¹⁰⁸ 'The distinction between thought and the will is simply that between theoretical and practical attitudes. But they are not two separate faculties; on the contrary the will is a particular way of thinking - thinking translating itself into existence - thinking as the drive to give itself existence.' Hegel (1991) p. 35.

Hegel begins by discussing two ineliminable elements of the will, the first being the moment of 'pure indeterminacy'. This is a formal capacity for abstraction, for holding oneself above one's embodiment in a particular social order or entanglement in particular ethical commitments. This Hegel describes as the 'I's pure reflection into itself, in which every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires and drives or given and determined in some way, is dissolved'.¹⁰⁹ Hegel, firstly, associates this notion with Brahmanism, a form of Hindu fanaticism in which thought reaches such a level of abstraction or pure contemplation that it has no discernable subject. Hegel also associates this element of the will with terrorism and nihilism, most famously when he talks of the 'fury of destruction' in the French revolutionary terror. The will that attempts to flee any limitation or determination, what Hegel describes as 'negative freedom' (not to be confused with Berlin's 'Negative Freedom'),¹¹⁰ is pathological,¹¹¹ characterised by a certain wanton, aimless destruction.

[T]here is left for it only negative action; it is merely the fury of destruction.¹¹²

Furthermore:

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Hegel (1991) p. 37.

¹¹⁰ Berlin. (1969).

¹¹¹ See Knowles (2002) pp. 29-30.

¹¹² Hegel (1977) p. 359.

¹¹³ Hegel (1977) p. 360.

This formal capacity for abstraction becomes pathological if left unchecked by a second element of the will, the moment of particularity. This is, essentially, the idea that *something* is willed or that the will resolves on a certain action.¹¹⁴ Each time one resolves on a certain path of action, one limits other potential outcomes or other possibilities of what one could make of oneself. For example, embarking on a PhD in philosophy makes it less likely that I will become a plumber or electrician.¹¹⁵ Thus a tension develops between the universal and particular elements of the will. From this point, Hegel moves to the moment of individuality, in which the will both wills something determinate yet still remains 'with-itself' or universal (i.e. it still sees itself as being capable of abstracting from all content). At this stage the moment of individuality is more of a desideratum, with much more philosophical work needed to get there.

From this point, Hegel changes tack and proceeds to look at three distinct determinations of the will from the perspective of both its form (the subjective ends that it hopes to translate into objectivity) and its content (what it wills). The first of these is the natural or immediate will. Hegel does not equate this concept of the will with animality, as he believes that humans have the unique capacity to stand above their drives and posit them as theirs own.¹¹⁶ Instead, the natural will originates in the multitude of drives confronting a human being. Not only are we confronted by a number of different drives but also a number of different objects with which so satisfy such desires.¹¹⁷ To cancel this double indeterminacy one

¹¹⁴ Hegel (1991) pp. 39-40.

¹¹⁵ Stern (2002) pp. 162-8.

¹¹⁶ The human being 'stands above his drives and can determine and posit them as his own', Hegel (1991) p. 45.

¹¹⁷ Hegel (1991) § 12.

has to resolve on something, to take the desire for hunger (for example) and seek to satisfy it by desiring a particular object (for example a steak). In Hegel's terms, the form of the will is entirely indeterminate, marked by the 'abstract universality' described above. Yet in terms of content, the will is determinate, the process of resolving on something being essential to the determination of the will. In contrast to this is the 'beautiful soul' which refuses to resolve upon anything determinate.¹¹⁸

In the second determination of the will, the arbitrary will, the indeterminacy associated with the natural will becomes explicit. Hegel refers to this determination of the will as arbitrary because, although it involves the explicit and self-conscious 'choosing' of one's ends, it still regards the content of what it chooses as external to, or separate from one's ability to choose.¹¹⁹ Like the natural will, its content is still made up of drives and inclinations given by nature. Being contingent (i.e. externally related to the subject) the content is in contradiction with the form of the will, which explicitly resolves on certain ends.

This claim also applies to more complicated determinations of the arbitrary will, whereby we attempt to incorporate our inclinations into a rational system.¹²⁰ Our 'choices' are then determined by some universal aim or project and not on the basis of particular resolutions upon drives or inclinations. Hegel, here, has in

¹¹⁸ See Hegel (1977) pp. 383-409.

¹¹⁹ 'The commonest idea we have of freedom is arbitrariness - the mean position of reflection between the will as determined solely by natural drives, and the will which is free in and for itself. When we hear it said that freedom in general consists of *being able to do what one pleases*, such an idea can only be taken to indicate a complete lack of intellectual culture, for it shows not the least awareness of what constitutes the will which is free in and for itself, or right, or ethics and so forth.' Hegel (1991) p. 48.

¹²⁰ Hegel (1991) p. 50.

mind the idea of happiness, in which we attempt to develop a more coherent *system* of desire satisfaction aimed towards the universal aim of well-being. Still, however, Hegel sees the content of this determination as external to its form. The content is still our contingent desires and inclinations, despite the universalistic ambitions of its form. However, against Alan Patten, for whom Hegel's critique of the happiness model is taken as confirmation of his affinity with Kantian-Fichtean autonomy,¹²¹ Hegel's response here needs to be understood carefully. Kant clearly rejects the happiness model on the basis of his nature-reason dualism. Hegel, however, who questions such an oppositional approach to nature and otherness in general, sees the aspirations of the happiness model as fundamentally progressive:

...the freedom of man, as regards his natural impulses, consists not in his being rid of such impulses altogether and thus striving to escape from his nature but in his recognition of them as necessity and as something rational; and in realising them accordingly through his will, he finds himself constrained only in so far as he creates for himself accidental and arbitrary impressions and purposes in opposition to the universal.¹²²

Having rejected the happiness model, Hegel still thinks that its underlying aspiration can be better realised in the notion of freedom, whereby the will takes upon the determination of the rational will. The rational will is identical in terms of both form and content in that what is willed is freedom itself i.e. it is freedom willed by freedom. Hence not only do we have determinate, subjective ends but also a determinate content to resolve upon. Understanding precisely what Hegel means by this is the concern of the next section.

¹²¹ See Patten (1999) p. 56.

¹²² Hegel (1986) *Philosophical Propadeutic*, translated by A.V. Miller (Basil Blackwell, Oxford) § 43.

3) Subjective Freedom

3.1) Hegel's Critique of Kant and the Empty Formalism

Objection

The notion of freedom willed by freedom strongly suggests that, for Hegel, freedom has a value beyond mere instrumentality and the process of striving for freedom should reflect this. Freedom is clearly a good in itself, not merely of utilitarian import as, for example, in John Stuart Mill. This formulation can also be taken to suggest that agents do not act on the basis of authority, social mores or inclination but on the basis of a rationally construed understanding of the free will. If acting otherwise, the form and the content of the will come into conflict. Alan Patten takes up a very strong interpretation of what Hegelian freedom demands of us, arguing that, properly understood, Hegel demands a level of critical scrutiny of our practices that goes all the way down.¹²³ Here, Patten employs the Hegelian term, 'infinite subjectivity', a term Hegel employs only in the morality section of the *Philosophy of Right*, which is an incomplete and indeterminate form of Right.¹²⁴ If Patten is right, however, and Hegel does demand no less than the 'infinite subjectivity' of modern agents, coupled with the demand that we take freedom as an end-in-itself, we are faced with the crucial question of how it is possible to derive content from this end. Furthermore, if Hegel is to make the 'empty formalism objection' against Kant, the claim that Kant's notion of freedom is vacuous because it is impossible to derive content from it, it would appear that he has to offer something that Kant does not.

¹²³ Patten (1999) p. 44.

¹²⁴ Hegel (1991) p. 158.

At this stage, I think that it is important to identify Hegel's relationship to Kant as regards the content of freedom. There are two related issues here (1) what motivates us to pursue freedom as an end? and (2) how can we derive duty or morality from the idea of freedom alone? If Patten is right, and Hegel is indeed firmly within the Kantian-Fichtean trajectory of autonomy, then it is unclear as to why he so virulently attacks Kant's position as empty and vacuous. Hegel claims that, against Kant's nature-reason dualism, desires are an essential precondition for action. Furthermore, he argues that desires can have ethical status, for example, love in marriage or showing patriotism towards the state.

Patten balances this apparent discrepancy by arguing that the motivational basis of action in Kant and Hegel is very different whilst simultaneously claiming that both share an understanding of freedom as separate from one's contingent desires and inclinations.¹²⁵ His objection to Kant is not that he understands freedom wrongly but that his notion of 'duty for duty's sake' fails to carry any motivational weight. Hence, in Hegel, it is argued that we must be motivated neither by duty nor by the *fact* that an end is prescribed by reason. For Kant, that an action is demanded by the categorical imperative is reason enough to pursue it. For Hegel, we *also* need to act on ends which are justified on the basis of reason alone and not on the basis of desire or inclination. However, our *motivation* to do so must come from an *inclination* appropriate to that end. For example, Hegel sees marriage as objectively rational, as central to the existence of modern ethical life and (therefore) essential to our self-realisation. However, my motivation to get married is not that it is justified by reason (although I must be aware that this is the case) but the inclination appropriate to this end, love or a

¹²⁵ Patten (1999) p. 53-63.

desire for companionship.¹²⁶ Patten argues, furthermore, that the appropriateness or inappropriateness of our inclinations must itself be justified by reason.¹²⁷ The point, then, is that Hegel's criticisms of Kant do not apply to himself because of his more nuanced understanding of the motivational basis of pursuing ends justified by reason. At this stage it is difficult to see how Patten avoids an infinite regress in his interpretation. If our motivations are to be justified on the basis of reason alone, then it is unclear why we should be motivated to think that a particular desire is appropriate to motivate us towards a particular end prescribed by reason. In other words, if we are to take Hegel's criticism of Kant seriously it must go all the way down and the answer thus far seems to stop arbitrarily.

Part of Patten's problem, I think, is that he overemphasises a dualism between freedom and natural desire or inclination in Hegel, a dualism I take Hegel as having *sublated*. It is the overcoming of nature-reason dualism that I take to be central to the concept of reconciliation. Patten draws a parallel between external authority and nature, arguing that both are antithetical to freedom.¹²⁸ He goes on to argue that an essential element of our understanding of freedom is the idea of making ones actions our own and thinking through things for ourselves. In the case of external authority (for example the case of acting uncritically upon the basis of religious authority) *and* the case of acting upon the basis of natural drives we are failing to realise this property of freedom. This parallel is not referred to explicitly in Hegel's work although it does rely upon a key element of Hegel's thinking, being aware of the rationality of ones actions and not following duty blindly. The immediate identification with ones world, for Hegel,

¹²⁶ Hegel (1991) p. 200-201.

¹²⁷ Patten (1999) p. 63.

¹²⁸ Patten (1999) pp. 63-73.

characterises ancient Greek ethical life.¹²⁹ As I will argue later, however, Hegel's critique of the immediacy of ancient Greek ethical life does not translate necessarily into the advocacy of critical reflexivity that Patten wants. Whilst, understanding the rationality of the institutions of ethical life is central to the realisation of freedom, it is rectitude that he praises rather than reflexivity.¹³⁰ There is a second respect in which Patten's analogy connects with Hegel's project in regards to Hegel's critique of romanticism. The spontaneous freedom achieved by pursuing the drives and passions is seen, in fact, to be nothing other than the pursuit of desires ingrained in and through social mores. Such desires must be moulded in relation to the demands of a *rational* social order. That desires strike us as particularly compelling is no good reason in itself to believe that we should pursue them.

As I have suggested, Patten tends towards too dualistic a reading of Hegel and his understanding of the relationship between reason and nature or otherness in general. As Pinkard argues, Kant claims that freedom entails some sort of non-natural causality (a transcendental causality) *above* and *beyond* the natural, causal order. This transcendental causality is capable of initiating chains of causality, which are not themselves the effect of any earlier causal chain. In contradistinction Hegel sees freedom in terms of the way in which we understand our stance towards our natural inclinations and desires¹³¹. What is at

¹²⁹ See Hegel (1977) pp. 267-289

¹³⁰ '[I]t is easy to say *what* someone must do and *what* the duties are which he has to fulfil in order to be virtuous. He must simply do what is prescribed, expressly stated, and known to him within his situation. Rectitude is the universal quality which may be required of him partly by right and partly by ethics' (Hegel (1991) p.193) See below on the critical disposition of subjects within ethical life.

¹³¹ Pinkard (2000) p. 472.

stake for Hegel is the extent to which we see our actions as our own, the extent to which we see our reasons for action as ones that originate in ourselves and with which we can identify.¹³² We are always capable of standing above our inclinations and desires; this is part of what it means to be human. It is not, however, that we are to act on a different basis from such inclinations and desires to be free. It is our ability to adopt certain inclinations as our own, to see them as motivating us in order to drive our various projects and in constructing our identities. As Pinkard claims,

The agents preferences, desires and impulses have a ethical status for the agent only to the extent that they fit into his overall project for life, fit into some sense of his own identity, who he is as the acting subject.¹³³

Patten accepts this to some extent in recognising that Hegel posits a very different motivational basis to that of Kant. However, underlying his interpretation seems to be too dualistic and un-Hegelian a relationship between reason and nature. Much of this argument rests on the understanding of Hegel's rejection of the happiness model of the will, for which Patten criticises Allen Wood's anti-Kantian interpretation.¹³⁴ I have already suggested that the reason Hegel rejects the happiness model of the will is that it still leaves the content of the will as external to its form. However, I have argued that Hegel rejects it for different reasons to Kant in that, for example, the organisation and integration of the content of the will around one principle is seen as fundamentally progressive, whereas for Kant it is treated as purely external. It is ultimately not happiness but

¹³² See, for example, Hegel (1991) p. 57. This is what I take Hegel to mean in describing the free will as the 'free will which wills the free will'.

¹³³ Pinkard (2000) p. 473.

¹³⁴ Patten (1999) p. 54.

freedom that should function as such an organising principle. Only when freedom is taken to be the content of the will itself can we take our desires and inclinations to be our own and not as a framework external to the subject. Freedom requires that our actions must stem from our own commitments and projects and that we must be able to comprehend them as such. In the happiness model, it is still the case that we take our inclinations and desires as being a 'given' or 'immediate' material to be acted upon by the will, whereas when we take *freedom* to be the content of the will, they are truly integrated into the structure of the will as our own.

This account of the motivational basis of Hegel's rationalist concept of freedom will be given more weight once we have considered the role of freedom in establishing our objectively realised identities and the impact of *Bildung* in forging identification with freedom-procuring institutions. For now, we should move on to the second question I proposed, as to how content can be derived from the end of freedom alone. Here Hegel comes into similar difficulties. The problem is that Hegel wants to criticise Kant's categorical imperative as empty and still maintain that his notion of freedom can generate content for itself. To understand Hegel's position here we need to understand what Hegel means by a *concrete universal*. An ordinary universal takes a set of particulars and picks out a common property from amongst them, being dependent upon them for its content. In contrast to abstract universality, the concrete universal is capable of generating content for itself. A good example of this is Hegel's description of *teleology* in the *Science of Logic*. The idea of *teleology* consists, firstly, of a subjective end to be projected onto the world, secondly, of the mediation of this end through external reality (a means) and, finally, in the realisation of this end.

End...is the concrete universal, which possesses in its own self the moment of particularity and externality and is therefore active and the urge to repel itself from itself.¹³⁵

What this simple idea conveys is that an end automatically points to means that are instrumental for its realisation. As in Kant's dictum that 'whoever wills the end, wills the means', Hegel's idea of teleology takes the will to be self-determining only when its determinations contribute to the realisation of its purpose. How does this notion contribute towards answering our initial question, however, as to how freedom can generate content from itself as a concrete universal? Hegel thinks that the infinite regress, which arises out of us attempting to justify our reasons for action, comes to a halt at the idea of freedom.¹³⁶ Given that each action we undertake could be justified with reference to some particular reason, which in turn could be justified in terms of another, ad infinitum, why is freedom something, which can be posited with no further justification? Hegel's answer must be that in order to create the question of an infinite regress, to attempt to find reasons for why we act the way we do, we already presuppose the idea of freedom as self-determination.¹³⁷ The subjective capacity of self-determination, the ability to raise oneself above our social mores, desires and inclinations, is already presupposed in the question of what reasons we can fall back on in order to question our purpose or identity. If this is true, then the preservation of such a disposition can be seen to be the ultimate end of human action, if we are to have any understanding of our purpose or identity at all.

¹³⁵ Hegel (1998) p. 739.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Hegel (1991) p. 52.

¹³⁷ I think Patten gives a fairly plausible account of how Hegel would respond to this objection. Patten (1999) p. 100. I still take his account of Hegel to be incomplete as I argue below.

This argument runs parallel to that for the freedom of *Spirit*. *Spirit* unfolds through pure rational necessity, which allows it to achieve a radical freedom, undetermined by anything given. It is, however, itself dependent upon one given, that '*Spirit* be'. As a foundational condition for the very nature of its freedom in rational necessity, this condition does not undermine *Spirit's* claims to radical freedom; rather it marks a starting point from which all else follows. In the same way, making freedom the content of the will functions not as an arbitrary limitation but a precondition for its very possibility.

3.2) Social Roles and the Possibility of Critical Reflection

The main problem with developing a Kantian interpretation of Hegel is that we lose sight of what is distinctly *Hegelian* in Hegel's account of freedom, namely the understanding of freedom as reconciliation. This involves a very different account of ethical disposition to that in Kant, one which stems naturally from the sort of roles and obligations one establishes within an ethical community, and not from reason alone. Although Hegel expects agents within ethical life to be able, if pushed, to provide intelligible reasons to themselves and others for their actions, he does not think that the operation of day to day morality works in this way. I now want to examine the practical operation of reconciliation in more detail, drawing upon Neuhaus's helpful clarifications of Hegel's argument. This section will begin to provide answers to some of the questions of motivation introduced in the previous section by looking more closely at how the 'subjective disposition' appropriate to freedom generates purpose in our lives.

Firstly, we need to examine Hegel's reasons for thinking that adopting the *right* subjective disposition to participating in social institutions is part of what it

means to be free. In other words, given that Hegel, so far, has a broadly intuitive notion of freedom as self-determination, how can this be reconciled with the counter-intuitive idea that such freedom can only consist in being bound by participation in social institutions and, furthermore, in seeing such institutions as constitutive of our freedom and thus (in some sense) identical with ourselves. Through examining Hegel's arguments in this respect, drawing on Neuhausser to clarify some areas of ambiguity, we can gain a better understanding of how Hegel understands the subjective disposition of freedom, particularly, what Hegel understands by being-in-oneself-in-another. We can, then, begin to crystallise what Hegel means when he claims that laws and institutions should not be '*alien* to the subject; on the contrary the subject bears *Spiritual witness* to them as to its *own essence*, in which it has its self-awareness and lives as in its element which is not distinct from itself, a relationship which is immediate and closer to identity than even [a relationship of] faith or trust.'¹³⁸

This argument has three aspects, that we regard institutions as (1) our end, (2) our essence and (3) the product of our activity. I shall deal with each of these in turn. Regarding social institutions as our ends entails a unity in content between the universal will and our particular wills. This unity takes upon different forms in different institutions for Hegel. In civil society, Hegel sees a unity of content in the mechanism of the market whereby the culmination of our various labours can be construed as some sort of common endeavour.¹³⁹ Only through such participation can we come together and maintain our common livelihood. This, however, is a fairly superficial unity whereby our wills still remain external to each other. We may participate for our common good but we do so only out of

¹³⁸ Hegel (1991) p. 191.

¹³⁹ Hegel (1991) pp. 224-226.

egotistic interest.¹⁴⁰ Within the family, in contrast, we adopt a less conscious unity of wills in which we undertake endeavours for the common good almost spontaneously, embracing their ends as our own.¹⁴¹ As Neuhouser notes, Hegel is talking about very different senses of the particular and universal will to Rousseau, whom attempts to connect the two in the 'Social Contract'.¹⁴² For Hegel, particularity does not refer to an individual taken in abstraction from the social whole, the egocentric will. Instead it refers to a determinate quality of individuals, the determinate position that the individual occupies in the world. Particularity is not something that stems from a feature of human beings, as in the egotistic individual, but something that stems from our social role. *It is already mediated through the universal.* For example, in the family the father is particular in that he bears a particular role of responsibility and particular duties towards other family members. Furthermore, his attachment to his ends is intuitive rather than self-conscious. The individual family member does not see his will as external to that of the family as a whole. Hence, in a very strong sense we can see what Hegel means by a unity of wills in the family. This does not only apply to the family, however, as this notion of particularity already points beyond a Rousseauian conception of the unity of wills.¹⁴³ Social institutions as a whole are seen not just as a means to ones private ends. They not only provide us

¹⁴⁰ 'The selfish end in its actualisation, conditioned in this way by universality, established a system of all-round interdependence.' Hegel (1991) p. 221. Hegel contrasts this form of instrumental universality with the self-conscious universality that one adopts as a citizen (see p. 275).

¹⁴¹ 'The ethical existence of marriage consists in consciousness of this union as a substantial end, and hence in love, trust and the sharing of the wholeness of individual existence.' Hegel (1991) p. 202.

¹⁴² Neuhouser (2000) p. 89.

with our means of subsistence but also constitute us as 'beings of standing'. Even in civil society, Hegel sees the particular roles we occupy (through different guilds) as being partially constitutive of whom we are.¹⁴⁴ Hence, the particular will (our determinate position within the social whole) and the universal will (the nexus of social institutions) can be seen as forming a fundamental unity, which stretches beyond one of mere fungibility or instrumental import.

In order to comprehend this unity we must move to a second level, the unity of essence. Underlying this non-fungible or non-instrumental unity is a unity of what Neuhausser terms our *essences* or practical identities.¹⁴⁵ Here, he claims, that Hegel does not mean essence in an abstract sense, although Hegel does claim that such an abstract, universal identity obtains between individuals in Abstract Right.¹⁴⁶ In the more comprehensive notion of freedom achieved in ethical life, we win our particular identities through the various roles we occupy within our social institutions.¹⁴⁷ These are our practical identities as opposed to our abstract identities as (for example) bearers of rights. By this, therefore, Hegel does not understand our unity as one with social institutions themselves but with our roles

¹⁴³ Many have challenged Hegel's interpretation of Rousseau in this regard. See Stern (2000) pp. 157-62, and Franco (1999) pp. 3-11.

¹⁴⁴ '[T]his nexus of capability and livelihood is a recognised fact, with the result that the corporation member needs no external marks beyond his own membership as evidence of his skill and his regular income and subsistence, i.e. as evidence that he is a somebody.' Hegel (1991) pp. 271-272.

¹⁴⁵ Neuhausser (2000) p. 93.

¹⁴⁶ 'Personality essentially involves the capacity for right and constitutes the concept and the basis (itself abstract) of the system of abstract and hence *formal* right.' Hegel (1991) p. 69.

¹⁴⁷ Hegel (1991) p. 191.

within them. Social institutions are undifferentiated from ourselves only in so far as they come to be seen as essential to maintaining and sustaining the various roles and identities with which we come to identify. These particular identities established through our social roles are fundamental in two ways. They both provide us with purpose or with projects through which to live our lives and give us self-esteem through giving us an identity in the world. Hegel is, here, making a more fundamental point than the rather banal observation that because our identities originate in socialisation we should not view them in abstraction from their social context. This is a claim with which even the most individualistic political philosophers could agree. He is claiming that having a practical and social identity is fundamental to who we are, endowing us with purpose and standing in the world.¹⁴⁸

The third point is that we must see the social world as dependent upon our wills. Although we are born into a world which is not of our choosing we must understand that its continued existence is dependent upon the collective activity of our wills. This is fundamental as it is a condition of freedom, for Hegel, that the will is not merely seen as a capacity for freedom but something that must be realised in the world for it to have existence. We cannot grasp our freedom unless we see our actions as impacting upon and constituting the social world.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ As members of families (Hegel (1991) pp. 202-203), corporations (Hegel (1991) pp. 271-272) and as citizens (Hegel (1991) p.275).

¹⁴⁹ This last condition must be placed in the context of the account of subjectivity which I developed in Chapter One. In other words, whilst it is important that people understand that their activities impact upon and shape the world around them, the underlying structure of the modern world has to be understood as a consequence of the designs of *Spirit* and not some form of collective, intentional activity.

How then are we to take these three steps as linking a notion of self-determination with social participation? Like Rousseau, Hegel believes that acting on the basis of the general will means that we are subject to no other will other than our own.¹⁵⁰ However, Hegel wants to say more than Rousseau in advancing this claim. By participating in social institutions we are doing more than merely participating in an endeavour of common benefit or acting in terms of the public interest but we are, furthermore, enabling ourselves to establish objectively realised identities.¹⁵¹ Participation in ethical life, therefore, allows us to be self-constituting, to translate who we take ourselves to be into the external world. Because our self-conceptions can only come about through social participation (we can have no self-understanding in abstraction from social practices) and because such conceptions only achieve actuality through activity in the world, ethical life can be seen as essential to self-determination.

One critical issue that is raised through this discussion is the extent to which, if we can have no self-understanding in abstraction from social practices, we can adopt a reflexive or critical understanding of ourselves and our social roles. Neuhaus, as I have suggested, is less open to the interpretation of Hegel as demanding critical scrutiny of our social practices.¹⁵² On the one hand he acknowledges the fundamental difference in Hegel's interpretation of ancient Greek ethical life and his understanding of modern ethical life. For Hegel, the

¹⁵⁰ The 'ethical powers that govern the life of individuals' are not perceived as 'alien' to the subject. Hegel (1991) pp. 190-91.

¹⁵¹ For example, Hegel frequently discriminates between the state (der Staat) and the necessity-state (der Notstaat) (for example Hegel (1991) p. 275). The former is self-consciously identified with as crucial to establishing our identities as citizens whereas the latter is solely of instrumental importance in allowing society to function properly.

¹⁵² Neuhaus (2000) pp. 110-113.

Greeks existed in an unreflective harmony with their social institutions, intuiting them as a natural and eternal order within which they obtained harmony.¹⁵³ Modern ethical life has to incorporate the growth of moral subjectivity, which has been thrown up by Christianity. The growth of the principle of subjectivity is ineluctable, despite Hegel's frequent romanticisation of the ancient Greek *polis*. Therefore, given this central transformation, one cannot simply be reduced to his or her social role without remainder. If we were to be entirely absorbed in our social practices there is no sense in which we could be free. Hegel requires the subjective affirmation and interpretation of our roles in order for us to be considered self-determining. We must, in other words, be able to stand back and accept or reject them. Of course, if such roles are justified by reason (which Hegel thinks they are in the modern world)¹⁵⁴ then our failure to reconcile ourselves with them would signal a form of unfreedom. Nonetheless, that we have the capacity to reject them is fundamental.

When pursuing Hegel's characterisation of the subjective disposition of modern ethical life as *trust*, Neuhouser claims that trust has two components. On the one hand, its 'cognitive content' is a harmony between institutions/practices, others and ourselves. On the other hand, the 'subjective content' of trust can vary from

¹⁵³ Hegel (1977) pp. 266-278.

¹⁵⁴ Hegel's reasons for thinking this are discussed below. Although this chapter is dedicated to presenting a reasonably faithful interpretation of Hegel – I will return to the question of whether one can accept Hegel's arguments regarding the subjective disposition of freedom whilst rejecting his arguments that the modern world is worthy of being deemed fundamentally rational. Moreover, there is also the question as to whether the framework Hegel appeals to in arguing that the modern social world is objectively worthy of being 'a home' can be crucially adopted for more radical purposes. I will later argue that both these options are open to Adorno.

'second nature',¹⁵⁵ an unreflexive identity with our institutions as in Greek ethical life, to a more critical or reflexive form of affirmation. He also draws a distinction between our motivation in affirming social institutions and the fact that such affirmation is subject to rational reflection. The claim is that it does not necessarily matter what the subjective form of affirmation is as all that is important for Hegel is that reconciliation *could* be subject to rational reflection. Hence, we may be reconciled to our social practices out of habit or social convention and still be free or self-determined given that such affirmation could, if required, be open to critical scrutiny and be justified. In this we acknowledge that even agents of habit are capable of reflectively changing their habits.¹⁵⁶

This position is not consistently argued by Hegel:

The broad distinction between the instinctive act and the intelligent and free act is that the latter is performed with an awareness of what is being done; when the content of the interest in which one is absorbed is drawn out of its immediate unity with oneself and becomes an independent object of ones own thinking, then it is that *Spirit* begins to be free, whereas when thinking is an instinctive activity, *Spirit* is enmeshed in the bonds of its categories and is broken up into an infinitely varied material.¹⁵⁷

Here, Hegel implies the necessity of a far more critical attitude to the institutions of ethical life. However, it does appear that the weight of evidence,

¹⁵⁵ Hegel (1991) p. 195.

¹⁵⁶ 'If what produces the procures the freedom associated with trust is the belief that ones social world is basically hospitable to ones deepest practical aspirations, then the subjective side of social freedom is in no way diminished when the belief is founded on reason rather than unquestioning faith. This also implies that the belief central to trust can be held in a relatively unquestioning form, it can be immediate trust, and still be social freedom (assuming it is at the same time a true belief)'. Neuhouser (2000) p. 113.

¹⁵⁷ Hegel (1998) p. 37.

especially in the *Philosophy of Right*, is on a far less reflexive relationship in which:

[T]he subject bears *Spiritual* witness to them [the laws and institutions of ethical life] as its own essence, in which it has its self-awareness and lives as in its element which is not seen as distinct from itself.¹⁵⁸

Within 'ethical life' we come to adopt an almost spontaneous sense of obligation and duty to one another:¹⁵⁹

In an ethical community it is easy to say *what* someone must do and *what* the duties are which he has to fulfil to be virtuous. He must simply do what is prescribed, expressly stated, and known to him within his situation. Rectitude is the universal quality which may be required of him.¹⁶⁰

Again:

¹⁵⁸ Hegel (1991) p. 191.

¹⁵⁹ How does this square with Hegel's understanding of Ancient Greece? I think that Hegel takes reflection (as demonstrated in Socrates retreat into his conscience) to be more appropriate in the polis given that the undifferentiated unity of Ancient Greece was radically deficient – unable to incorporate the principle of subjectivity. As the order of modern ethical life has accommodated this principle in its institutional structure (see below), the relationship of trust is more appropriate.

¹⁶⁰ . Hegel (1991) pp. 193-194. Hegel, here, seems to be displaying his usual contempt for those who treat ethical questions as inherently difficult or arduous – for whom 'rectitude can easily appear as something of a lower order'. Hegel seems to think that such strenuous moral deliberation is more appropriate to an 'uncivilised' (Ibid) community. In modern ethical life, however, ones duties and obligations are explicitly mapped out through participation in the institutions and practices of ethical life. Given that such institutions and practices have an underlying rationality in facilitating human freedom, rectitude is the most appropriate disposition to adopt within ethical life.

[T]he habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance and actuality of individual existence.¹⁶¹

As I will later argue, there is an underlying assumption here, which can be seen to run into Marxist thinking. This is that, situated within a framework which recognises and supports meaningful roles and pursuits, people are able to adopt an almost spontaneous sense of ethical relationship to one another. The structure of Hegel's argument for the centrality of ethical life is also interesting in this respect, in that it takes individual rights to be parasitic upon the ethical community rather than foundational, as they often are in liberal individualist accounts of rights.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Hegel (1991) p. 195.

¹⁶² 'Morality and the earlier moment of formal right are both abstractions whose truth is attained only in ethical life. Thus, ethical life is the unity of the will in its concept and the will of the individual, that is, of the subject' (Hegel (1991) p. 62). For Hegel, we have many different roles and commitments, each of which entails a different form of self-understanding. These extend from abstract conceptions of persons, for example individuals as bearers of rights or owners of property, to the ascription of moral subjectivity, for example responsibility, duty and conscience, to our more concrete roles in 'ethical life', as member of a family, practitioner of a trade or active citizen. Each level is parasitic upon the next, with our participation in ethical life being the foundation of both our capacity for an ethical disposition and the framework of protections offered over individual rights and property.

4.) Objective Freedom

4.1) Mutual Recognition

I have suggested that, for Hegel, social participation is the only means by which people can develop ascribe worth to themselves. Now it is time to flesh out this argument in terms of some deeper concerns of Hegel's philosophy.

For Hegel, to have a free will means to have a sense of ones will acting upon the external world and a sense that ones will is not dependent upon anything external for its existence.¹⁶³ There are three ways in which it can do this, (1) through negating objects in the world (2) through forcing recognition upon other subjects and (3) through obtaining the mutual, free recognition of other subjects. The first tactic is, for Hegel, futile. If we destroy objects in the environment to demonstrate our independence from them, we only demonstrate independence in a very partial sense in that we only negate one form of the object. Killing and eating an animal for food, for example, manifests itself in desire for another animal to kill *ad infinitum*.¹⁶⁴ To truly prove our independence in this way we would have to destroy the entire environment which, even if it left us still alive would mean that we had no more objects to negate and therefore, because the free will needs to be actualised in the world, would be left with nothing beyond the mere self-assertion of a will. We, therefore, require an object with which we can gain an acknowledgement of our freedom, which is not destroyed in the process. Hence, we arrive at the notion of recognition, whereby an agent receives acknowledgement from another agent of his freedom.

¹⁶³ Hegel (1991) p. 54. 'Only in this freedom is the will completely *with itself*, because it has reference to nothing but itself, so that every relationship of *dependence* on something *other* than itself is thereby eliminated'.

¹⁶⁴ Hegel (1977) pp. 104-110.

Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, begins from the standpoint of the philosopher in arguing that only by adopting a form of ‘mutual recognition’ can the subject’s desire for independence be maintained. This, firstly, involves something like the Kantian claim that individuals be regarded as ends and not means, ‘as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it’.¹⁶⁵ Secondly, it entails that we gain our own self-understanding as reflected in the other.

Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.¹⁶⁶

As I argued in Chapter One, freedom is achieved only as seeing oneself as part of a wider whole. In ‘mutual recognition’ we come to be part of

‘[t]he absolute substance which is the unity of different independent self-consciousnesses within their opposition, enjoying perfect freedom and independence; ‘I’ that is ‘we’ and ‘we’ that is ‘I.’¹⁶⁷

So far, however, Hegel is speaking only from the point of view of the philosopher. He next has justify this position phenomenologically, i.e. from the point of view of the experience of consciousness in order to prove that ‘mutual recognition’ is the only route by which the subjects demand for independence can be met. This task is performed in the famous dialectic of master and slave.¹⁶⁸

In the master slave dialectic, recognition is at first one-sided and unequal. In a

¹⁶⁵ Hegel (1977) p. 112.

¹⁶⁶ Hegel (1977) p. 112.

¹⁶⁷ Hegel (1977) p. 110.

¹⁶⁸ Hegel (1977) pp. 111-119.

fight to the death, the master obtains the coerced recognition of the slave.¹⁶⁹ However, as he only obtains recognition from the slave (whom himself is not worthy of recognition) he does not obtain the acknowledgement of his freedom from one who is free himself. Because he does not acknowledge the freedom he commands for himself in the other, his own freedom is nothing but abstract self-assertion. His own freedom can be attained only in dialogical reflection in the other, in recognition by another whom the master himself recognises as free. This apparent impasse is broached by the labour of the slave. Through labour,

¹⁶⁹ There are three main readings of the origin of the life and death struggle (as best summarised in Stern, 2002 pp. 75-83). The most simplistic reading is that the desire to impose ones will upon objects in the natural world is simply translated into a desire to impose ones will upon other subjects. This manifests itself in the life and death struggle. However, we can take this account to be missing an important element of Hegel's case – that the desire for recognition – to be actively recognised as a subject, is distinct from the desire to make another subject into a passive instrument of ones desires. The former account does not seem to provide a role for the demand for recognition in the origin of the life and death struggle. It is the unwillingness to give anything up in return for such recognition that leads to the fight to the death. However, the second argument seems to provide a weak explanation of why the life and death struggle must ensue. On a third reading, the fact that one party is willing to give up its life is indicative of its freedom: its ability to adopt a disposition of indifference towards its natural existence in reaching a higher end. The life and death struggle, as a test, is essential to the development of freedom itself. However, on the third interpretation, we can only possibly imagine the life and death struggle as a historically contingent form in which the subject's freedom can be demonstrated. In a civilised society such recognition is maintained by performing ones role in ethical life. Hence, the third reading has major implications for thinking about what work the master,slave dialectic is supposed to do in the Phenomenology, suggesting it to be part of a historical story rather than an argument driven by conceptual necessity. On reading two, we retain the conceptual element but have a weak argument as to why the fight to the death ensues, that the subject wants independence but is unwilling to give anything up in return.

the slave obtains a form of objectivity, which is unavailable to the master. The slave transforms the world around him in preparing food for the master and thus begins to understand the impact of his will in the world. From this follows a number of forms through which recognition is attained, the details of which I do not have the space to discuss here. The end point, as I have already argued, is 'mutual recognition'. This recognition must be given freely and not imposed upon another in order for it to obtain actuality and not be mere assertion.

The idea of mutual recognition explains, firstly, why Hegel thinks that our self-conception is dependent upon social interaction, as we each understand ourselves only through our reflection in the other. Secondly, it follows that social activity is the only means by which such self-conceptions can be translated into the world, as social interaction is constitutive of our practical identities. By the time Hegel wrote the *Philosophy of Right* much of the emphasis and radical potential of this idea is lost. However, the basic idea of mutual recognition can be seen as fundamental in justifying the role of particular institutions. Within social institutions, the demonstration of one's freedom does not depend upon risking one's life but upon filling posts or social roles which makes us worthy of the respect and recognition of one another. Hence, mutual recognition must be embodied in social institutions. However, the arguments that Hegel advances for particular social institutions in the *Philosophy of Right* still rest upon the assumption that such institutions objectively promote freedom because they best mediate the mutual recognition of individuals. The account of recognition is far more complex here and, in many ways, stripped of its radical simplicity. Recognition is now grasped in many determinations and forms. Different social institutions can be seen as mediating different forms of recognition. Before

turning to these specific forms, it is essential to understand the sense in which they can be seen as 'objective'. So far we have only been discussing the attitudinal requirements of Freedom. Bringing in the idea of Mutual Recognition and the requirement that it be mediated through a particular rational social order requires that we first understand what is uniquely *rational* about modern ethical life.

4.2) The Rationality of Modern Social Institutions

'Objective', in Hegelian terms can be understood in three separate ways, all of which can be seen to be attributed to the institutions of ethical life. Firstly, in embodying 'objective' freedom they must embody 'true' freedom, that is freedom that is true to its concept (outlined above) as opposed to merely 'common sense' ideas about freedom.¹⁷⁰ Secondly, 'objective' refers to the externalisation of the concept of freedom into actuality, into an institutional framework.¹⁷¹ Thirdly, in arguing for 'objective freedom', Hegel is claiming that the reasons he gives for the institutional framework in the *Philosophy of Right* have a validity independent from the subjective dispositions of those within them.¹⁷² In other words, he aims to provide an account of the rationality of social institutions, which is true whether or not their members subjectively affirm such institutions.

The claim of 'Objective freedom', in Hegel, can be seen to involve two prerequisites. Firstly, there is the more straightforward precondition that social institutions must provide objective conditions under which individuals can attain

¹⁷⁰ Hegel (1991) p. 48.

¹⁷¹ Hegel (1991) p. 190.

¹⁷² Hegel (1991) p. 227.

a free will.¹⁷³ This feature can be seen to have parallels with Rousseau's political philosophy, although it is formulated very differently. The second, more distinctly Hegelian argument, is that, taken together, the institutions of ethical life themselves replicate the structure of a self-determining will. The social whole is itself organised along the lines of the concept of freedom and, hence, in affirming the institutions of ethical life, one is identifying oneself with the concept of freedom itself.

As Hegel claims,

The fact that the ethical sphere is the *system* of these determinations of the Idea constitutes its *rationality*.¹⁷⁴

I shall first investigate this aspect of 'objective freedom', drawing upon Neuhouser's helpful clarifications, before looking at the various ways in which the institutions of modern ethical life more straightforwardly secure a basis for human freedom.

Hegel claims that '[a]s a living mind, the state only is as an organized whole, differentiated into particular agencies, which proceed from the one notion...of the reasonable will and continually produce it as their result'.¹⁷⁵ Neuhouser goes on to break this claim down into four parts. For 'objective freedom' to be realised, the framework of institutions must (a) be organised teleologically, (b) be self-replicating, (c) be 'articulated into specialised semi-autonomous functioning components' and (d) have their inter-relations determined by the rational concept.¹⁷⁶ In terms of teleological organisation, Hegel can be seen to be

¹⁷³ Hegel (1991) pp. 227-223.

¹⁷⁴ Hegel (1991) p. 190.

¹⁷⁵ Hegel (1971) *The Philosophy of Mind* translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford, OUP) §539.

¹⁷⁶ Neuhouser, (2000) pp. 121-2.

drawing an analogy between social and biological organisms, albeit an extremely limited analogy. By understanding a plant in terms of its *telos* we can come to grasp how the various differentiated parts and processes that make up its biological structure contribute the realisation of its purpose. Of course, the analogy is limited as Hegel thinks that, within the social organism, people are able to step outside of their immediate social roles and to reflect upon the rationality of the whole. In other words, the individual parts are attributed self-consciousness. However, it raises the centrality of the interpenetrating unity of universality and particularity in Hegel's thought, the idea that the whole subsists only through its differentiation into individual components, each of which, simultaneously, is maintained only through the whole.¹⁷⁷

Actuality is always the resolution of universality into particularity; the latter appears to be self-sufficient, although it is sustained and supported only in the whole.¹⁷⁸

In terms of reproducibility, the framework of institutions must be self-sustaining in two senses. Firstly, as I have argued, they must materially reproduce themselves as, for example, the family produces human beings and Civil Society produces material wealth. Secondly, they must provide for the *Spiritual* reproduction of the community, forging human beings whom participate in and identify with the social whole. I shall detail the various ways in which the latter is achieved below.

The most important, and distinctly Hegelian, aspect of 'objective freedom' is that the institutions of ethical life replicate the structure of the rational concept. As we have seen in Chapter One, in order for an object to be intelligible, reason must be structured in terms of the rational concept. This is because the structure

¹⁷⁷ See my discussion of Hegel's organicism in Chapter One.

¹⁷⁸ Hegel (1991) pp. 302-4.

of the rational concept is also that of reality as a whole. As I have said, the rational concept contains three moments, immediate unity, difference and mediated unity. This metaphysical claim is now seen to be given a more concrete elucidation in Hegel's political philosophy in that each aspect of the social order is seen to correspond to one of these moments. Hence, the family corresponds to immediate unity, in that it fosters an unconditional and unreflective bond of trust between its members. Civil society, conversely, corresponds to 'difference' whereby relations between atomistic individuals are only external. In the state, we have the moment of mediated unity, whereby the different spheres are coordinated yet preserved as differentiated moments.¹⁷⁹

4.3) *Bildung* - The Formative impact of Social Institutions

To get an idea of how this differentiated unity works, we need to understand the second feature of 'objective freedom', that of securing the means for people to realise their freedom. Central to this idea is the notion of *Bildung*, a broad term used to describe the forging of uneducated, natural individuals into free, self-conscious human beings. As I argued in Chapter One, Hegel's distinct solution to the problem of relating reason to ones instincts and desires is to forge the raw, natural, human being into one endowed with reason so that neither is in conflict. The human subject acts on the basis of reason, not for its own sake (as in Kant) but on the basis of drives or instincts which themselves are tamed and molded into reason. That we come to act upon instincts which accord with

¹⁷⁹ It is, incidentally, precisely this development of abstract categories in the Logic and subsequent application to the modern world that Marx objects to in his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State'. Marx (1974) pp. 57-199.

reason is a product of *Bildung*. As opposed to formal education, *Bildung* takes place behind the backs of its subjects. There is, therefore, no need to presume a desire for the acquisition of freedom amongst the participants of modern ethical life. By engaging in the family and civil society, which individuals must do of necessity to survive, they acquire the characteristics of free individuals by stealth. The very harsh and disciplinary nature of this initiation to the world is, furthermore, central to people coming to realise the importance of freedom.

The process of *Bildung* works through the coordination of activity in the two spheres mentioned above (family and civil society). I shall come to the role of the state later. Together, these spheres not only meet the requirements of the rational concept, but also promote the three separate conceptions of freedom I outlined above, abstract personhood, moral subjectivity and the 'social freedom' engendered through ethical life. They, therefore, maintain the lower as well as the higher types of freedom. Neuhaus identifies a number of reasons why the modern family can be seen to promote the values of freedom.¹⁸⁰ Whilst these arguments are by no means exhaustive and only briefly stated, they give some indication of how Hegel envisages participation in the institutions of ethical life as a form of *Bildung*. Firstly, the family engenders moral subjectivity through parental discipline. The child, originally a mass of natural desires and instincts, begins to identify with an authority outside itself and comes to transform itself in the image of the authority figure. This represents an important stage in the ability to direct ones raw inclination.¹⁸¹ Secondly, the family gives children an important

¹⁸⁰ Neuhaus (2000) pp. 150-157.

¹⁸¹ 'The end to which punishment s are directed is...of a subjective and moral nature, seeking to have a deterrent effect on a freedom still entrammelled in nature and to raise the universal into the childrens consciousness and will.' Hegel (1991) p. 211.

lesson in learning to treat collective ends as ones own, necessary for full engagement in ethical life. The relationship of trust, or intrinsic obligation to others, helps children think of their ends in terms of a common project.¹⁸² Thirdly, the family is central to attaining recognition. Children are not only furnished with particular traits from their parents but gain recognition of their particularity from them. Unlike the recognition individuals 'win' in the field of civil society, the recognition conferred from a parent to child is unconditional.¹⁸³ Finally, the family gives children the skills and confidence to find independence in the world. Hegel finds the modern nuclear family particularly well suited to this task, unlike the extended family, which he claims fosters dependence.¹⁸⁴

The formative effects of Civil Society are very different. Civil society is largely the realm of atomistic, *self-interest*, although the meeting of private ends is seen to be broadly consistent with the collective attainment of material well-being.¹⁸⁵ Hegel's admission of the inevitability of social inequality and poverty under such circumstances places serious limits on his claims in this respect.¹⁸⁶ The existence of the corporations is supposed to mitigate such atomism, although the *Solidarity* within different interests is, again, based on external relations of mutual gain, far from the volitional immediacy of the family. Central to engagement in civil society is the formative effects of labour. As Hegel claims in the *Phenomenology*:

¹⁸² Hegel (1991) p. 210.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 220-226.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Hegel (1991) p. 265, where Hegel discusses the structural inequalities in a market system.

Work...is desire held in check, fleetingness starved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence. This *negative* middle term or the formative *activity* is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence. It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its own independence.¹⁸⁷

This passage, from Hegel's description of the dialectic of master and slave, gives some important background regarding the formative qualities of labour. Labour channels the raw, natural desire of the worker into a specific goal, transforming or shaping a particular thing. Through this, the ends of the worker attain a 'permanence' or objective existence by which the worker can himself comprehend the impact of his activity. By shaping an objective existence through his activity he too comes to realise objectivity in that he sees himself as able to transform the world according to his own ends. Labour is an essential formative aspect in winning a free will.

The question, however, is as to what specific qualities of modern civil society give rise to its unique ability to generate and sustain 'objective freedom'. Here, Hegel argues, it is the particularly abstract nature of the relations between people within a capitalist market that allow them to achieve 'universality'. The capitalist market is characterised by a highly specialised division of labour and a specialisation of commodity production to meet ever more specific needs. Moreover, the reduction of concrete to abstract labour and the mediation of social relations through the medium of money (in Marxist terms), means that we come to regard others not in terms of their particularity but their being a *class* of 'human beings' with which we can identify.

¹⁸⁷ Hegel (1977) p. 118.

...out of the mediation [inherent in] universal exchange of labour and goods the individual becomes, and goes forth as, a self-consciously free will...which is also universal.¹⁸⁸

In Neuhausser's phrasing 'they establish an identity to that which is not identical'.¹⁸⁹ In opposition to Marx (and of course Adorno), therefore, the abstract nature of relations in civil society is a *positive* formative experience, so long as it exists in check with the other two key institutions of modern ethical life. In the family one receives recognition for one's particularity whilst in civil society one is as part of the universal class of humanity.

Finally, we come to the state. Hegel regarded the State as independent from both the immediate particularity of the family and the instrumentalist universality of Civil Society and saw it as able to regulate and maintain the distinction between the two. Whereas, in Civil Society, universality is an unintended consequence of individuals acting for their particular ends, Universality becomes a self-conscious end in the State:

The state therefore knows what it wills and knows it in its universality as something thought. Consequently, it acts and functions in accordance with known ends and recognised principles, and with laws not only *in themselves* but also for the consciousness.¹⁹⁰

By this Hegel means that the state expresses the universal through laws, which are publicly transparent. Citizens can see the universal through which they subsist as having emerged through public deliberation (of course, excluding women and most corporations) and objectified in law. Furthermore, as Patten

¹⁸⁸ Die Philosophie des Rechts: Die Mitschriften Wannemann (Heidelberg 1817) p. 125 quoted in Neuhausser (2000) p. 163.

¹⁸⁹ Neuhausser (2000) p. 163.

¹⁹⁰ See Hegel (1991) pp. 290-304.

argues, the universal nature of the state can be seen to possess two further dimensions, which separate it from Civil Society and the Family. Firstly, the universality Hegel refers to is that of a 'universal good', independent of people's contingent desires and inclinations. The State promotes the capacity for free and rational agency and strong social ties as rational goods, above and beyond whether we affirm them individually. In Civil Society, in contrast, universal goods are only accidental results from the selfish pursuit of ends. Secondly, the universal good promoted by the State is 'other-regarding', having to do with the good of the community as a whole and not ones self, family or close friends. Hence, in the rational State, we find the final moment of the Concept, mediated unity. Freedom now exists as 'Idea', as the 'true' concept of freedom actualised through a triadic structure of social institutions each representing one moment of the rational concept:

The right of the state is therefore superior to the other stages, it is freedom in its most concrete shape, which is subordinate only to the supreme absolute truth of the world *Spirit*.¹⁹¹

5) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed two central aspects of Hegel's political philosophy. I take these to be crucial to an understanding of the notion of reconciliation. Firstly, I have looked at the subjective disposition required by free agents. I have argued against interpreting Hegel as a Kantian in this respect, drawing attention to his less oppositional conception of the relationship between reason and impulse. I have also explored the nature of the ethical disposition acquired by agents in ethical life, arguing that it acquires the characteristics of a

¹⁹¹ Hegel (1991) p. 64.

'second nature'. Secondly, I have looked at the notion of objective freedom in Hegel, to examine how the subjective capacity for freedom and reconciliation is to be socially instantiated. I have argued that there are two crucial components at work here. These are, firstly, the existence of institutions which promote the mutual recognition of agents as persons of moral worth and, secondly, institutions and practices which develop an appropriate ethical disposition in agents. In the latter case, I have given a number of examples (from the relationships of family, civil society and citizenship) to demonstrate how Hegel envisages this process of *Bildung* to take place.

All these resources, I will later argue, are important for the understanding of reconciliation in the critical tradition, although there are crucial differences in content. Before developing Theodor Adorno's own notion of reconciliation, however, I want to step back to the question of Hegel's metaphysics. It is from this point that I want to develop Adorno's critique of Hegel.

3) The *Absolute* as Capital? Adorno's Reading of Hegel

1) Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I gave an account of Hegel's notion of reconciliation both at the metaphysical and political levels and suggested that many of the shortcomings in Hegel's thinking might be rooted in his inability to fully grasp the notion of social constitution. As I will argue, At the level of his metaphysics, Hegel misidentifies the collective activity of flesh-and-blood human beings with God, whereas, in his political philosophy, Hegel hypostasises the capitalist forms of the state, economic exchange and nuclear family. This chapter develops such criticisms more closely, via Adorno's *Three Studies on Hegel*, attempting to bring together both the critique of Hegel's metaphysics and his politics.

The key claim made by Adorno that I want to address here is that Hegel's *Absolute* is analogous in structure to capital. In examining this claim I want to begin to assess the extent to which Adorno can consistently think both with and against Hegel. On the one hand, Adorno can be seen to adopt Hegelian categories in articulating his understanding of the operation of the capital. On the other hand, Adorno accuses Hegel of hypostasising the capital relation and failing to understand it as socially constituted.

Before examining the substance of Adorno's argument, I want to first look more generally at the way in which Adorno reads historical texts. This is important in that it allows us to understand (1) why Adorno thinks he can develop an understanding of Hegel's philosophical vocabulary outside Hegel's

own *self-understanding* and (2) why Adorno thinks he can attribute features to Hegel's thinking (for example the *Absolute* as a representation of Capital) that Hegel himself does not. Following on from this, I begin with a preliminary account of Adorno's relationship to the German idealist tradition in general. Next, I begin to enquire as to whether the *Absolute-Capital* analogy holds. I do this at two of levels, examining whether it takes into account Hegel's substantive concerns with human freedom (as covered in Chapter Two) and whether the logical relationship is analogous.

I will argue that, because of Adorno's understanding of textual criticism, he is able to develop Hegel's vocabulary in a way which is not compromised by the more dubious aspects of Hegel's metaphysics (as described in Chapter One). In Chapter One, I argued that Hegel's mysticism and his strongly teleological account of rational necessity were incompatible with a rational and anti-determinist Marxism. In this chapter, I compound this criticism by claiming that Hegel's account of the relationship between particularity and universality mirrors the reduction of the qualitative to fungible commodities in capitalist exchange.

2) Adorno and Philosophical Texts

I take Adorno to be making five key claims as to the proper approach to Philosophical texts.

1) Adorno insisted on an approach to philosophy whereby the critic navigates within the parameters of a particular philosophical tradition rather than criticising it from outside. Instead of formulating first principles and then setting out to claim an intellectual victory over this or that theory, philosophy is to take as its starting point the development of internal tensions within an existing tradition. This approach is often described as 'Immanent Critique'.

In 'Tradition and Knowledge'¹⁹² Adorno claims that knowledge has become a hypostasised duplication of the world 'as it is'. We have become unable to see the world as socially constituted with an array of possible futures. Part of the reason for this is the intellectual division of labour, in which history has become a 'special, fact-gathering branch of science'¹⁹³ and philosophy has carved out its own niche in epistemology. As such, philosophy becomes unable to comprehend its own historicity.

However, Adorno does not, however, believe that such a division of labour can be skipped 'by fiat'¹⁹⁴ in adopting a radically different or more holistic philosophical approach. We cannot start from first principles or simply re-describe things in a different way. This is why, for example, Adorno's response to epistemology is characterised as the 'metacritique of epistemology', and not 'Against Epistemology' as it is often translated (from *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*).¹⁹⁵ In Adorno's twist on the disenchantment thesis,¹⁹⁶ the problem confronting modernity is that we have progressively disavowed the very mediations through which reason subsists (nature, language or tradition, for example). Central to this condition is what Adorno describes as the 'fallacy of constitutive subjectivity',¹⁹⁷ whereby the thinking subject thinks of itself as self-sufficient, outside the various mediations which are the condition of its possibility. It is a 'fallacy', firstly, because it denies what makes reason possible

¹⁹² Adorno (1973) pp. 53-55.

¹⁹³ Adorno (1973) p. 53.

¹⁹⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 205.

¹⁹⁵ For example, the translation by Willis Domingo (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982)

¹⁹⁶ See Adorno (1997) pp. 3-43.

¹⁹⁷ Adorno (1973) p. xx.

and, secondly, because it ideologically reinforces an illusion of freedom within a world in which we are objectively unfree. This is why, for Adorno, 'wiping the slate clean' is not an option. To do so merely repeats the 'fallacy of constitutive subjectivity' in assuming that such natural-historical conditions can be removed by an act of will.

For this reason, Adorno claims that his approach to philosophy cannot be described as a method.¹⁹⁸ A method, whereby one adopts some external schema to be applied to particular content, expects the object of knowledge to conveniently arrange itself around the subject's methodological apparatus. In rejecting methodology, Adorno heralds a 'transition to exegesis'¹⁹⁹ in which the tensions arising within the text itself are the starting point for enquiry. In this way, 'philosophy rests upon the texts it criticises'.²⁰⁰ Adorno approvingly cites Hegel's remarks at the opening of the *Phenomenology* that philosophy requires 'simply looking on'.²⁰¹ Of course, in Hegel, such spontaneous receptivity to the object is possible only because it is ultimately identical with the absolute subject.²⁰²

2) Whilst philosophy must remain within tradition, it can reinterpret the semantic power of particular concepts outside the intentions of the author. As Rosen argues, concepts 'can turn out to have an identity which in fact goes beyond the way that they function to organise those texts in which they were

¹⁹⁸ Adorno (1973) pp. 4-6.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁰² See the next section for Adorno's critique of Hegel in this respect.

originally used'.²⁰³ Hence, Adorno is adamant that grasping Hegel's concepts not be restricted to Hegel's 'self-understanding'.²⁰⁴

3) The possibility of developing concepts in this way rests upon the assumption that every philosophical concept carries a reference to natural-historical experience within it. Concepts are not neutral semantic entities but expressions of particular, epochal modes of human experience. As I have claimed, Adorno sees philosophy as proceeding from developing internal tensions in a text or tradition more generally. So, for example, he systematically engages with various distinctions in Kant's thinking (theory and practice, noumena and phenomena, concept and intuition etc.) which he takes to be ultimately untenable. However, the contradictions in Kant's thinking are not read as mistakes on his part or intellectual errors. Such contradictions attest to real historical contradictions, for example the distinction between knowing an object in-itself and as it appears to consciousness, which for Adorno testifies to the reified nature of objects of labour in the exchange society.²⁰⁵ Adorno calls this approach a 'metacritique' as it is an investigation of the conditions of possibility of particular philosophical systems. Whereas Kant enquires as to the conditions of possibility of experience, Adorno enquires in to the conditions of possibility of Kant's formulation of experience.

²⁰³ Rosen (1982) p. 153.

²⁰⁴ Adorno (1973) pp. 160-1.

²⁰⁵ 'The rigidly dualistic basic structure of Kant's rational, critical model duplicates that of a relation of production, in which commodities fall out of machines like his phenomena fall out of the cognitive mechanism; where the material and its own determinacy are as indifferent in relation to their profit as in Kant, who has it stencilled in.' (Adorno (1973) p. 387)

This account of concepts is possible because of what Adorno describes as 'metalogical reference'.²⁰⁶ Adorno wants to challenge Kant's notion that the existence of the categories can be epistemologically separated from their experiential content, instead claiming that for a concept to be thinkable it must contain a reference to experience. Concepts thought of in separation to their experiential content are not only empty but *blind*, not even thinkable.²⁰⁷

Such 'metalogical reference' means that even the most abstract philosophical systems can be deciphered to yield their 'truth content': 'The only way to pass philosophically into social categories is to decipher the truth content of philosophical categories.'²⁰⁸

4) The idea of 'metalogical reference' distinguishes Adorno's approach from that of a sociology of knowledge. For the latter, and it seems Adorno explicitly has in mind the sociologist Karl Mannheim, 'the truth or untruth of philosophical

²⁰⁶ Adorno (1973) p. 135.

²⁰⁷ Adorno (1973) p. 391. Adorno essentially reiterates Hegel's critique of Kant. The apriori categories of the understanding are unintelligible in isolation from the nonconceptual. Furthermore, the forms of time and space are not pure intuitions but accessed only through the conceptual. Adorno's concern is to open up the possibility of removing Kant's 'block' on metaphysics by demonstrating the mutual implicatedness of concept and content. However, that Kant's system is contingently rooted in a specific form of natural-historical experience is the conclusion of Adorno's study rather than being the opening premise. He is well aware that a consistent Kantian would claim all possible experience to be made possible only by the existence of the categories. The success of the argument is, therefore, contingent on the extent to which he can challenge the tenability of the various epistemological distinctions in Kant's system. For a fuller account of Adorno's critique of Kant see his Lectures on Kant's First Critique and Jarvis (1998) Chapter 6. Whilst following Hegel's critique of Kant to a point, Adorno does not accept Hegel's conclusions as will be seen below.

²⁰⁸ Adorno (1973) p. 198.

teaching has nothing to do with social conditions'.²⁰⁹ Mannheim posited a causal relationship between one's social base or membership of a particular group and one's knowledge of the world arguing that there is no socially or historically independent criteria of truth. Adorno does not, however, see the relationship between philosophical categories and sociology as externally contingent. Because categories by their very nature contain an experiential referent, to develop contradictions in philosophical texts *is* to engage in social criticism. Furthermore, such contradictions (if honestly and accurately attested to) reach beyond contingent perspectives to the very objective nature of social relations themselves.²¹⁰

5) From the above, we can see two notions of 'truth'²¹¹ in operation. Firstly, 'truth' refers to the ability of a philosophical system to testify to real historical

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Adorno has little patience with any form of relativism. In fact, he describes the emergence of relativism as a product of a necessary illusion involved in capitalist social relations.

'An entrepreneur who does not wish to be crushed by the competition must calculate so that the unpaid part of the yield of alienated labour falls to him as a profit, and must think that like for like – labour-power versus its cost of reproduction – is thereby exchanged; it can just as stringently be shown, however, why this objectively necessary consciousness is objectively false...The presumed social relativity of the intuitions obeys the objective law of social production under private ownership of the means of production.' Adorno (1973) p. 36.

²¹¹ Adorno's notion of 'truth' is fairly unique. It is Platonic, in that truth is an aspect of the (absent) good, and Hegelian in that it is embodied in institutions and practices (see Finlayson, 2003 p172n). Furthermore, given Adorno's philosophical negativism – truth often figures as a form of experience rather than a set of propositions. Certain types of modern music, for example, are capable of delivering a somatic, non-discursive form of experience which pieces through the 'universal fungibility'.

contradictions and not bury or hide the antagonisms of bourgeois society. Kant's project, for Adorno, is particularly interesting in this respect. Secondly, 'truth' consists in presenting natural-historical experience as changeable or open-ended and not converting features of present experience into historical invariants. Adorno, drawing heavily on aesthetics, is concerned precisely with trying to open up potential space for different forms of experience. Despite the apparent immutability of modern consumer capitalism and its debasement of human experience, this is not the only imaginable world.

The question remains as to why it is only the specific tradition of German Idealism that is worthy of engagement. I can think of two reasons why Adorno thinks this. Firstly, as I have indicated, attempts to go beyond the questions raised by Kant and Hegel by setting the problems they raise to one side often result in adopting positions which they have already anticipated and criticised. This is particularly true of the ontological positions of Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger.²¹² Secondly, the dynamic philosophical approaches of Hegel and latter Marx best acknowledge the real antimonies of bourgeois society without hiding behind logical non-contradictoriness. Adorno is particularly scathing of Anglo-American analytical philosophy, seemingly for this reason. It is difficult, however, not to read a great deal of academic snobbery into Adorno's Germanic focus.²¹³

²¹² See Jarvis (1998) Adorno (CUP, Cambridge) Ch. 8 for a good account of Adorno's work on these three philosophers.

²¹³ Adorno, whilst in Oxford, complains that "making actual philosophical things comprehensible to the English counts among the impossibilities [of working at Oxford], and to a certain extent I have to screw back my work to a child's level in order to remain intelligible" Quoted in Buck-Morss (1978) pp. 138-9). Ayer, who was also at Oxford at the time, refers to Adorno as a "comic figure" with a "dandified manner and appearance". The department, he claims, was "more

2) Adorno's account of Hegel - Some Preliminaries

What I will do now is look at how Adorno's approach to philosophical exegesis works in relation to Hegel's writing. Adorno, as a materialist thinker, wants to challenge Hegel's idealism, whilst being very much aware that many attempts to move beyond Hegel fall back to positions Hegel had already anticipated. Furthermore, Adorno does not take Hegel's *absolute* idealism, however, to be straightforwardly idealist. Adorno wants to argue that idealism and realism are not opposed for Hegel. It is precisely through absolute idealism that the opposition between matter and a consciousness that bestows form is extinguished. For this reason, Hegel can make the claim in the *Phenomenology* that his 'method' is one of 'simply looking on'²¹⁴ and not mere subjectivism. The system of knowledge is ultimately identical with the absolute; hence it refers beyond the subject.

In what sense, then, is Hegel still wedded to idealism? Adorno still wants to maintain that Hegel dissolves 'anything not proper to consciousness into a positing by the absolute *Spirit*'.²¹⁵ Hegel, Adorno argues, is caught in a contradiction between his Fichtean inheritance (the idea of the world as derived from an original positing) and the implications of his own 'dynamic totality' which discards any original positing. Hegel wants to grasp the world as a positing by *Spirit*, yet in making everything commensurable with *Spirit*, he has to do away with the very idea of a foundational subject that does the positing.

amused than impressed by the attention he was directing to the philosophy of Jazz". (Ayer (1978) p. 153)

²¹⁴ Adorno (1993) p. 6.

²¹⁵ Adorno (1993) p. 10.

Both world and subject are ultimately identical. In Adorno's words, Hegel's *Spirit* 'tries to jump over its own shadow'.²¹⁶

This creates a problem for Hegel. The 'I', in not being distinguished from all else, 'belongs instead to what it is opposed to', it belongs to what is posited (Adorno (1993) p. 14). Fichte (and Hegel's) response to this problem is the abstraction of the subject from the individual. Whereas Kant, more honestly, testifies to the irreducibility of the (empirical) world and a transcendental subject, Fichte tries to 'extricate' the transcendental subject further and further from facticity. For Kant, the transcendental subject needs a 'supplementary' content, sensuous nature, in order for knowledge to be possible. Adorno argues that both Hegel and Fichte, in contradistinction, abstract the subject from the empirical individual through the logic of their attempts to move beyond Kant. They, however, forget that 'I' must designate some consciousness or other and end up making *Spirit* 'nonsense'.²¹⁷

Adorno claims that this abstraction Hegel's position mirrors the abstract social relations of capitalist society. Hegel is really expressing a certain social form albeit whilst unaware that he is doing so. Adorno is aware that reading Hegel in this way makes him susceptible to the 'reproach of sociology',²¹⁸ the charge that Adorno is abandoning the procedure of immanent critique and merely mapping an external social structure onto Hegel's system. However, Adorno denies that this is what he is doing, given that he takes his starting point to be the incoherence generated by Hegel's abstraction from the empirical subject. Rather than read this as an intellectual error on Hegel's part, however, Adorno thinks

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹⁸ Adorno (1993) p. 18.

that the abstract nature of Hegel's notion of *Spirit* accurately says something about the fetishised nature of modern life.

What does Adorno mean by this? Firstly, *Spirit's* mediation of individual moments functions in a manner analogous to society's mediation of human individuals through social labour. There is a logical relationship between the two. Just as in the exchange society, each exists only for 'someone else', reduced to a mere moment of a larger whole, each moment of *Spirit* exists only by virtue of the totality: 'The individual fact can no more avoid it [*Spirit*] than the individual person can avoid the *contrainte sociale*.' ²¹⁹

Secondly, *Spirit's* abstraction from the empirical is analogous to the operation of the exchange society in which the individual properties of human beings and the goods they produce are subsumed by universal exchange. Society attains a hovering, suspended character, appearing not as the collective work of flesh-and-blood human beings but as an entity with a life of its own:

As the unity of human subjects who reproduce the life of the species who reproduce the life of the species through their labour, things come into being within society objectively, independent of reflection, without regard to the specific qualities of those who labour or the products of labour. ²²⁰

Finally, just as capitalist socialisation is accompanied by the violent restraint and containment of human powers and forms of expression, the 'labour of the concept' idolised by Hegel, is a form of heteronomy. For Adorno, concepts are formed in and through the attempt to understand and manipulate nature.²²¹ In coming to know and control nature (here Adorno means both the external world and our own somatic or corporeal being) under the mechanism of subsumptive

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

²²⁰ Adorno (1993) p. 20.

²²¹ Adorno (1973) p. 11/Adorno (1993) p. 22.

classification it comes to be fixed and immutable. Hence 'the strains and toils of the concept are not metaphorical'.²²²

Thus, in summation, Hegel is driven towards the empirical by the incoherence of his own attempts to abstract from it. Furthermore, society is not a purely empirical entity but embodies the mechanisms of *Spirit*. However, the society Hegel's system represents is not one standing at the pinnacle of reason's triumph but the 'false' society of universal exchange. Hegel, for Adorno, is mistaken in identifying it as such. He transfigures (abstract) labour, 'which is the suffering of human beings',²²³ into the triumph of reason.

Before looking in more detail at these claims, there is a further important sense in which Adorno takes Hegel to be mistaken. Hegel, firstly, takes the totality of social labour and presents it not as a product of human activity but the '*actus purus*' of *Spirit*. There is a reversal of constitutum and constituens. Secondly, However, Adorno recalls Marx's 'Critique of the Gotha Program' in claiming that the totality of social labour itself also needs a substratum, physical nature. The absence of any material substratum in Hegel's thinking is itself seen to mirror the historical separation of physical and mental labour. It represents the hypostasis of one pole of labour, mental, in abstraction from the corporeal. Whilst the hypostasis is deceptive it is not of Hegel's own invention. Adorno thinks that the 'closed universality'²²⁴ of social labour requires everything to be mediated through social labour to the extent that we have no access to that beyond the subject.

²²² Adorno (1993) p. 21.

²²³ Adorno (1993) p. 23

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Therefore, the reconciliation heralded by Hegel between man and world is described by Adorno as a 'trespass' against real reconciliation. It is a false assertion of oneness in a world of 'unreconcilable violence'. Adorno's position here is not the trivial claim that Hegel's ethical justification of the modern social world fail to map onto the world as it is, that he simply 'got it wrong' in adhering too enthusiastically to the potential of the French Revolution. For many of Hegel's defenders it is Hegel's underestimation of the nefarious impact of capitalism and not his substantive philosophical claims that force him into his theodicy of the modern world.²²⁵ However, for Adorno, it is not the case simply that Hegel's reconciliation has been espoused prematurely, rather that the structure of reconciliation in Hegel's work itself is one of 'annexing the alien',²²⁶ of subsuming all otherness (see below). As I have claimed, this is not a 'mistake' on Hegel's path but testimony to the experiential basis of Hegel's system in the embryonic capitalism of early 19th Century Prussia. It is all the more impressive in that, 150 years on, it has proved itself to be true beyond Hegel's expectations.

A world integrated through production through the exchange relationship, depends in all its moments on the social conditions of its production, and in that sense actually realizes the primacy of the whole over its parts; in this regard the desperate impotence of every single individual now verifies Hegel's extravagant conception of the system.²²⁷

Despite accusing Hegel of the 'celebration' of Bourgeois labour, Adorno also sees a certain sense in which Hegel denounces the whole. Firstly, Adorno warns

²²⁵ See Smith, Tony (2001) Review of 'Hegel on History' by Joseph McCarney in *Historical Materialism* Volume 9 Number 1

²²⁶ Adorno (1973) p. 191.

²²⁷ Adorno (1993) p. 27.

against seeing Hegel's idolisation of the state as some sort of mistake or irrelevant addition to his political philosophy. The excessive authority of Hegel's state is necessary only because he recognises that the contradictions in civil society, the drive towards impoverishment and the creation of a 'penurious rabble',²²⁸ cannot be contained without the imposition of external authority. Hence, he testifies to the irreconcilability of bourgeois social relations. Secondly, however, Hegel cannot transgress the limits of bourgeois society without negating the thesis of *Absolute* identity. The speculative identity of rationality and actuality requires that the dialectical principle not radically extend beyond 'what exists'.²²⁹ At least, the ethical foundations of Hegel's political philosophy must be rooted in institutions and practices, which are tangible and concrete. Yet Hegel's thinking is also a critique of positivity, refusing to take 'facts' at face value and unveiling the dynamic mediations through which they subsist. Hegel fails to follow through the critical impulses of his thinking and, instead, comes to rest in absolute identity. Yet, although he fails in terms of his own criteria he also proves himself true as 'in reality this very non-identity has the form of identity'.²³⁰ In other words, the failure to register anything outside of the dialectic, to assume the identity of identity and non-identity, is testimony to the drive of capital to dominate each and every aspect of human practice.

3) Some Critical Issues

Adorno's identification of the logic of Hegel's *Spirit* with capital relations raises a number of important problems. Firstly, many contemporary Hegel commentators would argue that Hegel's substantive concerns with human

²²⁸ Hegel (1991) p. 267.

²²⁹ Adorno (1993) p. 1. I challenge this interpretation of the double-dictum in Chapter Four.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

freedom do not lend themselves to the analogy with capital relations described above. Hegel's entire project is dedicated to the development of capacities for human self-determination and is not an ideological apology for totalitarianism. In response to such claims we could restrict the analogy to a *logical* analogy between the structure of Hegel's *Spirit* and that of capital. This analogy raises some fundamental issues as regards Adorno's use of Hegelian vocabulary and his relationship to Marxism. Thirdly, and most importantly, the analogy raises important questions about the constitution of capital. Adorno's identification of capital with Hegel's idea, leads to a very one-dimensional conception of capital relations. If capital has in fact become a self-actualising power, what chance is there of its overthrow? I shall deal with these three areas in sequence.

3.1) Hegel's Substantive Concerns

Firstly, there is the question of Hegel's own views on capitalism and their relation to his views on human freedom. A more sympathetic reading²³¹ sees Hegel as having a greater affinity to simple commodity production, not keen on the expansion of capitalism yet resigned to its inevitability and unable to conceive of a better means of social organisation. However, Hegel's philosophical justification of wage-labour seems to suggest otherwise.²³² Furthermore his attempt to justify capitalist exchange on the grounds that it

²³¹ See McCarney (2000) p. 189.

²³² 'I can *alienate individual* products of my *particular physical and mental skills* and active capabilities to someone else and allow him to *use them for a limited period*, because, provided they are subject to this limitation, they acquire an external relationship to my *totality* and *universality*.' (Hegel (1991) p. 97). Hegel thinks that only through externalising one's powers in this way can one become conscious of ones abilities.

allows the subject to achieve 'universality', being abstractly identified as part of a 'class' of human beings through the 'universal exchange of labour and goods'.²³³ As I have argued, this is precisely the opposite position to Marx and Adorno.

However, given this basic commitment to capitalism, Hegel is still deeply concerned with the prospects for human freedom. Hegel's idea of freedom requires a 'true reconciliation', involving not only the objective existence of freedom (freedom in accordance with the standards of reason) but also subjective freedom (the subjective identification with social institutions and the satisfaction of the subject's particularity). In other words, there is a set of firm ethical commitments in Hegel's thinking which make demands that cannot be accommodated within modern capitalism. Rather than providing an ideological gloss on capitalism, Hegel gives us critical resources to challenge it.

There are a number of problems in Adorno's interpretation which mean that he fails to draw on such resources. Adorno wants to correct widespread misunderstandings of Hegel (especially in the English speaking world). He attacks those (such as Veblen, Dewey and Santayana) whom identify a connection between Hegel and German imperialism and fascism²³⁴ in his idolisation of the state. Likewise, he rejects Popper's claims of 'moral and legal positivism'.²³⁵ However, Adorno himself tends towards such claims in interpreting Hegel as a Fichtean. Hegel's appeal to the state is of a very different nature to that of Fichte.²³⁶ Hegel's appeal to the state is orientated towards the facilitation and preservation of mutual recognition. It acts as an external device

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²³⁴ Adorno (1993) p. 28.

²³⁵ Popper (1969) p. 41.

to maintain the forms of recognition received in participation in the family and civil society in addition to engendering unique 'civil' forms of recognition itself. Adorno's references to Hegel's use of the term 'submission',²³⁷ however, succumb to a rather crude interpretation of Hegel's political enterprise.

No amount of interpretive skill would let us dispute away the fact that the word submission means the opposite of freedom ²³⁸

Firstly, Adorno too quickly lumps Hegel in with Fichtean coercion rather than seeing mutual reciprocity as the ethical foundation of Hegel's political thought. This point is, perhaps, of minor importance, given that ultimately what Adorno wants to claim is that, irrespective of Hegel's intentions, he is forced into developing a highly authoritarian notion of the state in response to the contradictions within civil society. Mutual reciprocity must dissolve if the 'penurious rabble' is to be kept in check. However, secondly, this statement raises confusion as to Adorno's own conception of freedom. As I will argue, Adorno, like Hegel, emphatically rejects the 'marketplace' notion of freedom as solely 'being able to do as one pleases'.²³⁹ Also, like Hegel, he sees freedom as giving oneself over to the Other, adopting the Hegelian language of reconciliation. Furthermore, he rejects the Kantian notion of autonomy, instead prizing the value of humility, the 'attempt to do justice to what is other, won

²³⁶ In Fichte, the state functions primarily as an external means of coercion to make sure all parties do what they have promised to do in terms of the social contract. The freedom available to those in Fichte's contract is very limited. In Fichte's state, 'no one must remain unknown to the police' (quoted in Gibson, A. (2002) *Rethinking an old Saw in Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford) p. 247).

²³⁷ Adorno (1973) p. 350.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Hegel (1991) pp. 48-9.

from reflection on ones own limitations'.²⁴⁰ By polemically dismissing Hegel in this way Adorno comes across as a crude liberal.²⁴¹

Furthermore, Adorno does not register the difference between Objective and *Absolute Spirit*. Hegel, Adorno argues, remains 'ideological' in that his philosophy 'alleviates' the contradictions of civil society within the *Absolute*. Adorno accuses Hegel of 'suspending' the dialectic, in demanding the modern social world to be one worthy of reconciliation.²⁴² This implies that Hegel's *Absolute* somehow acts as a mitigating device for the contradictions of civil society. Adorno appears to be being disingenuous here. Hegel is well aware of the evils of the world arising from civil society. Poverty and, in the extreme, war are necessary outcomes of capitalism. However, he takes a rather stoical attitude to such evils. Reason, as the 'rose in the cross in the present'²⁴³ must facilitate our reconciliation to a world in which suffering is an inevitability. Hence our attitude towards 'objective *Spirit*', the realm of politics and social relations, is one of rectitude, of fulfilling our role. The sort of practical freedom Hegel associates with our everyday activity is often of a fairly austere type. So whilst Hegel often raises problems with a capitalist economy, its undermining of the independence of the state and its tendency to create the 'penurious rabble', he affirms the basic institutions of civil society as being fundamentally rational. However, in the realm of objective *Spirit* we are to respond stoically to such contingencies and achieve real freedom in the higher levels of philosophy, art and religion.

²⁴⁰ Adorno (2000) p. 169.

²⁴¹ See Chapter Five for a fuller account of Adorno's notion of freedom.

²⁴² Adorno (1973) pp. 334-8.

²⁴³ Hegel (1991) p. 47.

In this respect Hegel is very much within the Lutheran tradition of dealing with the pains of the world by inner withdrawal.²⁴⁴ However, rather than merely acting as an extension of 'objective *Spirit*', 'absolute *Spirit*' embodies a conception of freedom qualitatively different from that of 'objective *Spirit*'. The *Absolute* 'retains the highest contradiction within itself'.²⁴⁵

This is not an accusation made by Marx, who sees Hegel as moving beyond his own standpoint only through pushing the negation of the negation into the absolute. Marx recognises in Hegel's idealism, a hypostasis of the condition of alienated labour. Yet he also sees, in the unceasing movement of the dialectic beyond what merely exists, the possibility for transcending such alienation:

The Phenomenology is, therefore, a hidden, mystifying and still uncertain criticism; but inasmuch as it depicts man's estrangement, even though man appears only as mind, there lie concealed in it all the elements of criticism, already prepared and elaborated in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint.²⁴⁶

3.2) The Logical Analogy

3.2.1) *Constitutum and Constituens*

Hegel's attitude towards capital is not, however, Adorno's primary concern. What he is more interested in is the mechanisms of abstraction at work in both Hegel's hypostasis of *Spirit* and the fetishism of capital. In Hegel, the substantive realms (political and social institutions and practices) are embodiments of the Idea. Although Hegel is occasionally muddled on this point his underlying project is to map out an abstract metaphysical system to which

²⁴⁴ See Marcuse (1986) p. 14.

²⁴⁵ Hegel (1998) p. 824.

²⁴⁶ Marx (1992) p. 385.

reality is to later correspond.²⁴⁷ There is really no two-way interchange between thought and the real world, the latter is merely the embodiment of the former. This inversion of ground and what is grounded can, therefore, be seen to mirror the domination of dead over living labour. Furthermore, at the level of the individual, Hegel's logic reinforced the formal, legalistic freedom of capitalist social relations.²⁴⁸ If the truth of everything is an abstraction of itself, freedom can only be conceived in abstract, formal terms. Hegelian freedom can be seen to be logically connected to a state in which we are free in being able to sell our labour power but are forced to do so of necessity. It is freedom with no concrete content.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ See Smith (1999) On the Homology Thesis in Historical Materialism Volume 11 Number 1. In response to C.J. Arthur, Smith claims this objection both rests on a misunderstanding of Hegel and is ultimately trivial. Hegel's abstraction is, Smith claims, merely 'thinking about thinking', a process of abstracting generalisations from the way in which people talk about and perceive the world they live in (Smith, 2003 p. 188-9). Such 'thinking about thinking' has no intrinsic relation to capitalism, no specific connection to the process of fetishism, but is something that people do at all times. Indeed we will still need second order thinking under socialism. I want to argue that a) this is not Hegel's position and b) even if it were this objection is not trivial for Adorno in terms of his objection to identity thinking.

²⁴⁸ See Arthur, C.J. (2003) The Hegel-Marx Connection in Historical Materialism Volume 11 Number 1 p. 183.

²⁴⁹ This is something of a caricature of Hegel's position. Whilst Hegel does maintain a rather legalistic conception of freedom in Abstract right, this is dependent upon the wider sphere of Ethical Life, rooted in social institutions and practices that promote self-determination (see Chapter Two). Whilst Hegel was naïve to think that such practices could withstand the impact of capitalism, his notion of freedom itself can be seen to point more productively beyond abstract legalism.

3.2.2) The Preponderance of the Universal

Perhaps the most important criticism underpinning Adorno's response to Hegel regards Hegel's philosophical privileging of the universal. This is Adorno's greatest concern with Hegel's project, despite Hegel's own claim that dialectical movement preserves differentiation. Against Gibson²⁵⁰, who claims that Adorno is merely misinterpreting Hegel in a Fichtean light, it appears that Adorno's prime concern is more in terms of what Hegel is allowed to do within his own terms. Hegel's assertion of the value of the individual and his emphasis on differentiation is superseded by the driving logic of his system:

The conception of a totality harmonious through all its antagonisms compels him to assign to individuation, however much he may designate it a driving moment in the process, an inferior status in the construction of the whole ²⁵¹

This process is bound up with a fundamental problem with Hegel's conception of the individual and particular:

There is only one way for Hegelian logic succinctly to identify a universal and an undefined particular, to equate cognition with the fact that the two poles are mediated; and that is for logic which Hegel also views as an a priori doctrine of general structures, not to deal with the particular as a particular at all. His logic deals only with particularity, which is already conceptual. Thus established, the logical primacy of the universal provides a fundament for the social and political primacy that Hegel is opting for. ²⁵²

The 'individual' and 'particular' in Hegel are merely the concepts of 'particularity' and 'individuality' and as such deny themselves. For Hegel the Concept is 'the infinite form, the free creative activity which can realise itself

²⁵⁰ Gibson (2002) p. 260.

²⁵¹ Adorno (1974) p. 17.

²⁵² Adorno (1973) p. 326.

without the need for a material present outside itself²⁵³. For Adorno, it is precisely such 'material' which makes concepts thinkable. Adorno's dialectic is therefore of an entirely different nature to that of Hegel, operating in and through the poles of identity and non-identity. Hegel's assumption of thought's self-sufficiency is the *sine qua non* of identificatory thinking. Therefore, despite Hegel's claims to give such moments their due, to preserve in thinking the differentiated moments which constitute it, he must ultimately bow to the primacy of the universal.

3.2.3) The Negation of the Negation

As I have claimed, the crux of Adorno's relation to Hegel rests upon the extent to which Hegel can accommodate differentiation. The analogy between Hegel's *Absolute* and the operation of Capital ultimately rests on the reduction of otherness to sameness. Just as the self-movement of the concept in Hegel dissolves all otherness, so does capital come to dominate every aspect of social life. The key, for Adorno, is Hegel's tendency towards integration is the 'negation of the negation'.

Hegel's negation of the negation, it is claimed, pushes Hegel's dialectic towards 'absolute integration'. Indeed, such integration, Adorno associates with Auschwitz, the supreme indifference to particularity, '*Absolute* negativity is in plain sight and has ceased to surprise anyone.'²⁵⁴

That negative enquiry produces a positive result is seen to lend itself to the affirmation of the *status quo*, precisely against the 'positivity' that was the target of Hegel's criticism. This is especially so in light of the horrors of twentieth

²⁵³ Rosen (1984) p.156.

²⁵⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 362.

century history. Instead, if we are to take up the critical element out of Hegel's thinking, 'the seriousness of unswerving negation lies in its refusal to lend itself to sanctioning things as they are'.²⁵⁵ So whilst Hegel's critical philosophy attains its dynamism from being able to find contradictions or insufficiencies in all categories or identities, it ultimately presupposes an identitarian framework in the 'identity of identity and non-identity'.²⁵⁶

To those entirely sceptical of Hegel's metaphysical claims, such objections may seem straightforward. Yet Adorno wants to rescue certain critical aspects from Hegel's philosophy whilst rejecting both the experiential content and key elements of the structure of Hegel's dialectic. His rejection, using Marx, of *Spirit* as an autonomous source of content attacks Hegel at his core. This is the basis of Adorno's analogy of *Spirit* to capital, that *Spirit's* production of content from itself mirrors the production of exchange value for its own sake. Yet Adorno's language is still embedded in Hegelian categories, for example, dialectic, mediation, reconciliation. He claims to be able to adopt the dialectic as a critical procedure for 'disintegrating' the logic of identity²⁵⁷ by unveiling the mediations through which thought subsists. Rosen, in his book *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism* suggests that, firstly, Adorno is guilty of a misreading of Hegel and

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁵⁷ According to Adorno, to think conceptually (identity thinking) is to disavow the content of that concept. To identify a particular we do not say what it is but what category or law it comes under.

'Identity thinking says what something falls under, or of what it is an example or a representative – and therefore is not itself' Adorno (1973) p. 149.

Adorno thinks that by 'identifying' an object we render it fixed and intransient and leave it open to manipulation. The concept is, thus, an instrument of domination.

that secondly, this misreading undermines his basis for distinction between positive and negative dialectic.

The problem is that the tension between the raw 'content' and the 'concepts' applied to them can always be transcended in Hegel's thought. This is a presupposition of the Hegelian dialectic. *Spirit* is an autonomous source of content which 'operates behind the point at which the common opposition between positive and negative holds, and, for this reason, Adorno's suggestion that the movement of dialectic be subdivided is misplaced: if the negative movement takes place so, ipso facto does the positive one.'²⁵⁸ For Adorno it is the tension generated by the untruth of identifying non-identical concepts and objects that is the basis of his negative dialectic. It is a dialectic, which, thus, does not take as its starting point the inevitability of its transcendence. This, for Rosen, amounts to a rejection not only of the affirmative aspect of Hegel's thought but also of Hegel's whole enterprise. For Hegel, there is 'no such thing' as an affirmative and negative side to his thought, they are not distinct.

Adorno, however, insists that it is not the 'identity of identity and non-identity'²⁵⁹ that makes dialectical thought possible but by the fact that identity and non-identity are not reducible to each other. It is the non-identical, an undialectical element, not exhausted by thought which makes dialectics possible.

Adorno has to admit that his enterprise can not be seen as a strict development of Hegel's thinking, which, indeed, he does in *Negative Dialectics*.

²⁵⁸ Rosen (1982) p. 163.

²⁵⁹ Adorno (1973) p. 7.

If it was objected to this that the critique of the positive negation of the negation would cut the vital nerve of Hegel's logic and permit no dialectical movement at all, then this latter would be delimited to a naïve faith in the authority of Hegel's self-understanding.²⁶⁰

Hence, in terms of Adorno's own rule for philosophical interpretation, he can claim to have developed an understanding of Hegel's dialectic outside Hegel's own self-understanding.

A further point of contention arises when we consider whether or not Adorno is interpreting Hegel correctly. Adorno's objection to the 'negation of the negation' (the positive in the negative), as I have stated, is that it is bound up with a strongly teleological notion of human progress. To assert such a claim of rational progress in the face of Auschwitz is barbaric. However, it is not necessary to read Hegel in this way. For Hegel scholars such as Raya Dunayevskaya and H.S. Harris,²⁶¹ for example, dialectical movement can involve retrogression just as it can involve progress. If the objection is that the 'negation of the negation' is bound up with the inevitability of historical progress then it is certainly disputable that this is the only way in which it can be conceived. This is certainly not Marx's understanding of the negation of the negation:

[I]n grasping the *positive* significance of the negation which has reference to itself, even if once again in estranged form, Hegel grasps man's self-estrangement, alienation of being, loss of objectivity and loss of reality as self-discovery, expression of being, objectification and realisation. In short, he sees labour – within abstraction as man's *act of self-creation* and man's relation to himself as an alien being as the emergence of *species-consciousness* and *species-life*.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Adorno (1973) p. 160-1.

²⁶¹ See, for example, the introduction to Dunayevskaya, R (1973) *Philosophy and Revolution* (London, Pluto) and the short monograph by H.S. Harris (1995) *Phenomenology and System* (Hackett, Indianapolis).

²⁶² Marx (1992) p. 395.

Here we appear to have a more creative and less one-dimensional reading of the negation of the negation than in Adorno. We can think of the first negation as the refusal to be defined as a commodity and the second negation on terms of the potentialities and powers unleashed through that first refusal. On this reading there is no reason to connect the second negation with a teleological account of history. The argument is simply that struggle against capital involves the invocation of new creativities, forms of human relationships, senses of identity etc., which arise through rejection of how we are defined through the capitalist system. Such a reading would avoid a sense of negation that was merely an empty refusal.

There would appear to be a good reason why Adorno himself does not explicitly move in this direction, given that the focal point of his thinking is negation of a world which makes Auschwitz a possibility. To invoke a sense of the positive in the negative would appear to give Auschwitz some sort of redemptive significance. Recall that in terms of Hegel's theodicy evil is explained as a necessary precondition for the existence of good.²⁶³ It is only in the fall from the innocence of the Greek *polis*, and the resultant atomism, that the potential for reconciliation in ethical life arises. Would Adorno be committed to such a schema were he to accept that it is in our recognition and response to evil that the potential for human goodness lies? I explore this issue at greater length in Chapter Five, arguing that this is an issue over which Adorno is tied. For the time being, it is clear that Adorno's response to Hegel as regards the 'negation of the negation' raises difficulties in his own project, difficulties which arise through his attempt to radically move beyond Hegel.

²⁶³ See Beiser (2005) p. 270-275 for an interesting discussion of Hegel and the problem of evil.

It is not only the teleological nature of Hegel's negation of the negation that is at issue here. As I suggested in the introduction, there is also a fundamental distinction to be made between the *negation of negative conditions* and negation which ultimately passes over into the positive. This is an issue I have to postpone to Chapter Four.

4) The Constitution of Capital

I have argued that Adorno is largely right to argue that Hegel's logic can be seen to mirror the structure of capitalist accumulation, despite many of his substantive concerns for human freedom. However, this analogy has fundamental implications for understanding the constitution of capital. Hegel's *Absolute*, as a self-actualising entity, operates in an analogous manner to capital in that it operates above and beyond human beings and in that it 'tolerates nothing outside itself',²⁶⁴ absorbing all qualitative difference into itself. However, what (normally Hegelian) Marxists want to claim is that Capital itself is constituted by the alienation of human labour. Capital *is* human labour, which, through capitalist social relations, is converted into an external power confronting human beings. This is essentially what Marx's theory of value is to explain, how the things we make come to exercise power over us. To not recognise capital as constituted by labour is not an intellectual error as such. Capital is an abstraction from human labour but a *real* abstraction. Labour *really is* mediated through the value form; it is not merely that we see it in that way. However, this must mean that it operates differently from Hegel's logic.

In Marx, we can come to grasp capital as a form of labour at points in which the capitalist system breaks down into periodic crises. At these moments, the contradiction internal to the constitution of capital comes to surface. The

²⁶⁴ Adorno (1993) p. 6.

appropriation of capital rests on human suffering, on expropriating human energies (capital's use-value) into an abstract commodity to be manipulated and exploited. The rejection of such commoditisation can be witnessed in strikes or demonstrations or even seemingly trivial actions such as forging sick leave from work.²⁶⁵ Thus, the subjection of concrete to abstract labour can be seen to be incomplete, human beings can never be wholly commoditised. Capital rests upon constantly negating its own use-value, living labour.

According to Arthur, Hegel's *Absolute* can be seen to operate in a similar manner. Recall that *Spirit* moves by 'the labour of the negative',²⁶⁶ by negating all that is opposed to it. *Spirit* negates nature, yet nature turns out in the end to be nothing but an unrecognized part of itself. Negation, thus, always involves higher levels of integration. The *Absolute* represents the highest level of such integration, whereby we come to see the whole of reality as a construction of *Spirit*. Capital operates on a similar principle in that it integrates labour into the value form. However, the analogy only works from the point of view of Capital. The Marxist *really* wants to claim that capital's claim to self-sufficiency is false. This parallels the critique of Hegel for mistakenly seeing the whole of reality as the product of Mind and not the practices of flesh-and-blood individuals. Furthermore, nature is a genuine other to *Spirit* as is Labour to Capital. Thus, we can claim that Hegel's system testifies to the failure of Capital to grasp its origin in living labour.

Adorno, however, faces a key difficulty in conceptualizing capital in this manner. As Gibson argues, Adorno never really properly explains the root of the domination of exchange value, tending to view it as a social apriori rather than a

²⁶⁵ See Holloway, J. in *Open Marxism Vol 1 – 'In the beginning was the Scream'*.

²⁶⁶ Hegel (1977) p.10.

consequence of the dual character of labour. There are certainly elements of Adorno's thinking in which the principle of exchange assumes an almost transhistorical character.²⁶⁷ However, the claim that Adorno 'equates the idea of the social character [of production] with reification'²⁶⁸ and identifies the social with totalitarianism is misplaced. Gibson claims Adorno to be, firstly, existentialist in his privileging of individual virtuosity and of holding a Kantian view of autonomy.²⁶⁹ Not only does he explicitly reject the latter²⁷⁰ he also speaks of a 'constellation' of inter-subjectivity, individual subjectivity and nature in his essay 'subject and object'.²⁷¹ His rejection is of the 'administered society', the mechanisms of compulsion operating in late capitalism, and not sociality *per se*.

However, Adorno also fails to specify more concrete mechanisms at the root of humankind's unfreedom. Gibson claims that the emphasis on exchange rather than the dual character of labour presents the capitalist's problem of valorisation as solved.

Total rationalisation does away with the revolt that Marx argued was central to capitalist reproduction.²⁷²

Rather than winning its freedom on the back of human suffering, which necessarily rebounds against it, capital can merely assimilate developing

²⁶⁷ 'If barter is the secular form of sacrifice, the latter already appears as the magical pattern of rational exchange, a device of men by which the Gods are overthrown by the very system by which they are honoured' Adorno (1997) p.47.

²⁶⁸ Gibson (2002) p. 273.

²⁶⁹ Gibson (2002) p. 274.

²⁷⁰ Adorno (2000) p. 169.

²⁷¹ Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund (2000b) *The Adorno Reader* (Brian 'o Connor ed.) (London : Basil Blackwell) p. 75.

²⁷² Gibson, 2002 p. 285.

contradictions. However, Gibson is too quick here in making such claims. Firstly, Adorno is well aware of the antecedent condition for the production of exchange value in the dual character of labour.²⁷³ Secondly, he recognises (in highly orthodox Marxist terms)²⁷⁴ that capitalism is founded upon the exploitation of one class by another. However, he wants to maintain that class can no longer be experienced as such due to the emaciation of human experience. Furthermore, he is deeply sceptical of the traditional mechanisms of class politics, especially of the replacement/supplement of the revolutionary class for the revolutionary party. Such scepticism is essentially related to his refusal to identify the end of capitalism as an end to all forms of domination.²⁷⁵ However, despite such scepticism, Adorno could never concede that the problem

²⁷³ Adorno (1973) p. 192.

²⁷⁴ 'This makes it necessary to consider the concept of class closely enough so that it is both preserved and changed. Preserved: because the distinction between exploiters and exploited not only persists undiminished but grows in compulsion and fixity. Changed: because the oppressed, today in accordance with the forecast of theory the overwhelming majority of humanity, cannot experience themselves as a class' (quoted in Jarvis (1998) p. 58)

'While proletarian class consciousness may not indeed exist in the advanced capitalist countries, this does not necessarily mean, as the commonly held view would have it, that social classes do no longer exist. Class was originally defined in terms of the means of production, not in terms of the consciousness of its members' (Adorno, (1968) *Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?* In Proceedings of the 1968 GSA (Frankfurt) p. 235).

²⁷⁵ Adorno wants to broaden the notion of reification to instrumentalist relations with nature. He wants to challenge the notion that an end to alienation (in the Marxist sense) would necessarily result in human freedom. Structures of domination are not restricted to the domination of capital over labour. To end domination would require non-instrumentalist relations with both internal and external nature and not merely a transformation in the nature of our social relations.

of valorisation could be solved. The total commoditisation of human beings is not only impossible but unthinkable:

There is no light on human beings and things, in which transcendence is not reflected. Inextinguishable, the resistance against the fungible world of exchange in that of the eye, which does not want the colours of the world to be destroyed. In appearance is the promise of what does not appear.²⁷⁶

5) Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued, firstly, that Adorno's appropriation of Hegel is consistent with his approach to philosophical interpretation in general. Hegel is interpreted in terms of the reference to natural-historical experience within his texts. Such an analogy explodes Hegel's use of particular concepts and allows Adorno to develop them outside Hegel's self-understanding. Adorno rejects the semantic function played by particular concepts in Hegel's system (vis a vis their experiential basis in the 'exchange society') yet simultaneously draws upon a radically critical Hegelian language in order to undermine that very mode of experience itself.

Secondly, I have argued that Adorno's dismissal of Hegel often misses out on some important resources²⁷⁷ to articulate the demand for human freedom, particularly in ignoring the ethical basis of Hegel's thinking and conflating objective and absolute *Spirit*. Indeed, I will argue in subsequent chapters that Adorno is very much reliant on a Hegelian understanding of freedom.

Thirdly, the analogy of *Spirit* with capital need not lead to a one-dimensional conception of capitalism if we consider the analogous function of the 'labour of the negative' (in Hegel) and capital's negation of its own use-value (in Marx).

²⁷⁶ Adorno (1973) p. 404-5.

²⁷⁷ Bearing in mind the problems raised with such resources in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, Adorno's main problem is not in failing to grasp the root of exchange in the dual character of labour but his scepticism, both in terms of class consciousness ever materialising amidst modern consumerism and in terms of there being a suitable agent to deliver revolutionary change. However, this is not merely a question of historical analysis but is tied up with philosophical significance of 'negation' in Adorno's thought. I subject this to a greater degree of scrutiny in the following chapter.

4) Immanent Critique and Determininate Negation in Adorno

1) Introduction

So far, I have argued that Adorno's appropriation of Hegel does not necessarily contradict his commitment to the idea of social constitution. Indeed, Hegelian categories are essential to his ability to articulate notions of inversion and alienation. Of particular importance here is the analogy Adorno draws between Hegel's Absolute and capital. However, I have also highlighted some significant departures that Adorno makes from Hegel's thinking. Adorno rejects Hegel's understanding of the negation of the negation, his understanding of the relationship between the universal and particular, and his inversion of *constitutum* and *constituens*. In this chapter, I want to more closely examine the form that Adorno's *negative dialectic* takes in the absence of such key elements of Hegel's metaphysics. I want to argue that Adorno's philosophical negativism is essential to his commitment to the idea of social constitution and that, moreover, this places him in a stronger critical position than many of his critics in the second generation Frankfurt school.

To begin with I want to say a little more about the primary object of Adorno's critique, the unfreedom of modern subjects, to better orient the discussion that follows. I draw on Max Weber and Karl Marx as Adorno's key influences in making this claim. Next, I want to deal with two related misconceptions of Adorno's response to social heteronomy, found in Jurgen Habermas and Albrecht Wellmer. These are, firstly, the charge of 'performative contradiction' and secondly, the claim that Adorno appeals to an 'aesthetic' form of rationality

which is the 'other' of discursive reason. I reject these criticisms of Adorno on the basis that they, firstly, employ wilful misinterpretation of his work and, secondly, that the sort of distinctions upon which they rely (e.g. system and lifeworld) are precisely the type of separations forms that a notion of social constitution seeks to undermine. I next turn to the question of the extent to which Adorno relies upon the Hegelian notions of immanent critique and determinate negation. Important differences between Hegel and Adorno emerge here, in that determinate negation in Adorno does not generate a discursive notion of the good but merely indicates or (in a Wittgensteinian sense) 'shows' the good in the face of radical evil. Adorno invokes the *Bilderverbot* (the 2nd commandment) at this point to rule against the positive depiction of utopia. In the remainder of the chapter I identify three models (atonal music, the constellation, and the dialectical image) in order to clarify Adorno's meaning of determinate negation.

2) The Unfreedom of Modern Subjects

Adorno and Horkheimer's 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, sets itself the ambitious task of discovering why "mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a kind of barbarism".²⁷⁸ Enlightenment, which promised liberation from fear and ignorance, has resulted in a "universal fungibility"²⁷⁹ of which the bureaucratized and mechanized brutality of Auschwitz is the logical outcome. Adorno thinks that the world has become one in which people are (predominantly) valued only in terms of their usefulness for others. It is this *cold* way of looking at others that precipitates such horrors as

²⁷⁸ Adorno (1997) p. xi.

²⁷⁹ Finlayson (2002) p. 4.

Auschwitz.²⁸⁰ Not forgetting the awfulness of the times Adorno lived through, which underlie his immense pessimism, it is not difficult to think of many more recent examples of barbarism (Rwanda, the Balkans, and Sudan etc.) to substantiate much of the force of Adorno's rhetoric. Adorno borrows part of the explanation for this story from Max Weber.²⁸¹ With the growth of the natural sciences, the world is robbed of all *Spiritual* or substantive value. In the *disenchanted world*, those kinds of knowledge which are instrumental (in that they best allow for the control and manipulation of external nature) become progressively more dominant, 'Whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect'.²⁸² Disenchantment renders instrumental reason an end in itself, aside from the substantive ends it is to serve. Linked to this process is the ever-increasing expansion of bureaucracy. The bureaucratic machine, the iron cage, quickly acquires a momentum of its own, aside from the substantive ends of government it is expected to fulfil. The disenchanted world is one governed by impersonal rules and procedures in which people lead ever more rigid, regimented and predictable lives.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ '[C]oldness, the fundamental principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which Auschwitz would not be possible.' Adorno (1973) p. 363.

²⁸¹ See 'Science as a Vocation' in (1948) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* translated by H.H Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Routledge, London). For some good secondary reading on Weber and societal rationalisation see Wolin, S. (1984) *Max Weber: Legitimation, Method and the Politics of Theory* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford), Löwith, K. (1932) *Max Weber and Karl Marx* (George Allen and Unwin, London) and Whimister, S. And Lash, S. (eds.) (1987) *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity* (Allen and Unwin, London).

²⁸² Adorno (1997) p. 6.

²⁸³ Sheldon Wolin offers an excellent account of Weber's iron cage, defining it in terms of "legal codes and administrative organisations that promise order, predictable decisions, regularity of

Thus, according to Weber, there is a contingent, historical link between the dominance of certain forms of knowledge, which emerge alongside the growth of the natural sciences, and socially sedimented patterns of unfreedom. In terms of this Weberian account of societal rationalisation, the modern world can be seen as unfree in two main senses. Firstly, instead of responding to the highest *Spiritual* and cultural values we become slaves to economic compulsion or purely mundane passions. Disenchantment has come to rob the world of inherently worthwhile or valuable pursuits and, thus, has reduced all action to a kind of instrumental behaviour disassociated from substantive human ends. The disenchanted agent is merely a vehicle for her impulses and desires and cannot be seen to be acting autonomously in the Kantian sense. Secondly, the predominance of knowledge which best allows for the manipulation and control of nature leads to people becoming habituated in treating not only objects in terms of their fungibility i.e. merely as means to satisfy the subjective ends of the agent, but also human subjects. Increasingly subjects behave strategically and instrumentally towards one another and come to regard one another as means to their own ends.

The other part of the story comes from Karl Marx. Adorno's main connection to the Marxist tradition can be seen in his adaptation of the category of commodity fetishism. In *Capital* Volume 1,²⁸⁴ Marx argues that the process of capitalist exchange involves a subsumption of the heterogeneous qualities of

procedures, and responsible, objective and qualified officials; into economics that operate according to principles of calculated advantage, efficiency and means-end strategies; into technologies that promote standardisation, mechanical behaviours and uniform tastes." (Wolin (1984) p71)

²⁸⁴ Marx (1975) pp. 81-94.

commodities under the homogenous and abstract category of value. Non-identical and incommensurate use-values are abstractly identified as exchange values. This predomination of exchange value is itself rooted in the subsumption of concrete labour (the expenditure of labour in a particular form with a definite aim) by abstract labour (the expenditure of socially necessary labour), which determines the exchange value of a commodity. When, therefore, we compare the relationship between different commodities we are really expressing the relationship between individual labour and that of society. The exchange process requires that social relations be presented in the "fantastical" form of a relationship between commodities. This is because we take "exchange value" to be a property of the commodity itself and not a social relation between producers. In doing so we come to see social and historical processes as operating above our heads rather than as products of our own practice.

Adorno's interests as a musicologist and aesthetician lead him to predominantly use the decline of western cultural production as exemplary of the general shift in the structure of capitalism. Art's "use-value", for Adorno, resides in its "purposelessness" - its autonomy from economic production and societal prescription.²⁸⁵ However, as capitalism develops, the demands of capitalist exchange *substitute* the genuine "use-value" of cultural products with "exchange value" - the extent to which a commodity can be exchanged with others:

Everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it is something in itself. For consumers the use value of art, its essence is a fetish, and the fetish - the *social valuation* which they mistake for the *merit* of works of art becomes its only use value, the only quality they enjoy.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ See Adorno (1997) p. 225.

Such developments in culture are exemplary of the fate of all commodities in capitalist society. We are left with "the production of exchange value for its own sake"²⁸⁷ - the ever-spiraling production of commodities, which justify their existence only to the extent that they can be exchanged and not that they meet genuine human need. "Production", Adorno claims, "forgets its human aims".²⁸⁸ Often castigated as a mandarin aesthete who finds all ideas of "production" and "labour" distasteful - and not without justification²⁸⁹ - Adorno's underlying concern seems to be the development of different social relations within which production can be re-attached to genuine human needs. His goal comes close to a fairly orthodox Marxist position in calling for "production for use by the living rather than for profit".²⁹⁰

The ethical implications of the "exchange society" are devastating. Adorno wants to argue that it is precisely this abstract identification of human beings that makes possible the bureaucratized and mechanized genocide of Auschwitz. The gradual conversion of human beings into "tools" within an increasingly "administered world" reaches its apogee in mass murder.²⁹¹

This understanding of societal rationalisation is addressed at the epistemological level in Adorno's seminal work, *Negative Dialectics*. These

²⁸⁶ Adorno (1997) p. 128.

²⁸⁷ See Adorno (1968) p. 239.

²⁸⁸ Adorno (1993) p. 12.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, *Sur l' Eau* in Adorno (1974).

²⁹⁰ Adorno (1973) p192. Of course, Adorno cannot say what "genuine need" is in any categorical way as all use-value is now mediated through exchange-value. He can only point towards the dissolution of such mediation.

²⁹¹ Adorno (ed.) (1976) *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* translated by G. Adley and David Frisby (Heinemann, London) p. 59.

arguments can be seen as a development of ideas sketched in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* instrumental reason has three characteristics, which can be summarised as follows,

- I. “The explanation of every event as repetition”.²⁹² Particular events, objects or properties are only known when they can be seen to share certain characteristics with other particulars and can be placed under the ambit of a pattern of occurrence, a general law or a conceptual framework. Similarly, the laws/concepts that classify particulars are subsumed under higher order concepts/rules from which the former can be seen to be deducible.
- II. The separation of the knowing subject from object. Enlightened reason requires that concepts/laws with the “widest cosmological role”²⁹³ be given precedence i.e. concepts/laws with the most universal breadth. In a parallel process, enlightened reason takes it upon itself to rid the world of anthropomorphic projection. By this I mean the projection of human value onto the external world. That which is most objective is that which can be furthest separated from the distorting influence of human beings. Our understanding of particular phenomenon is isolated from the somatic, attitudinal effects they generate.
- III. The principle of instrumentality. Causal explanation moves from being contemplative (in the mythic world) to interventionist. Only those concepts/laws which best allow for the control and manipulation of nature gain precedence.

At this stage it is difficult to know exactly how Adorno wants us to understand the relationship between these claims. In *Negative Dialectics*, however, it is clear

²⁹² Adorno (1997) p. 12.

²⁹³ See Bernstein (2001) p. 83-90 for a detailed account of this process.

that all three characteristics can be seen to be integrated in terms of what Adorno describes as *identity thinking*.

Marx's notion of fetishism (see above) appears to be at the root of Adorno's association of identification and heteronomy. Adorno, however, moves far beyond Marx's limited and historically conceived discussion of the term, claiming that *all* acts of identification function in this way. For Marx, it is not conceptual thinking *itself* which is the source of reification but particular socio-historic conditions. For Adorno, the problem has far deeper epistemological roots. The concept itself is the "organon of thinking" and all conceptual thinking involves identification. "Any definition is identification."²⁹⁴

According to Adorno, to think conceptually is to disavow the content of that concept. To identify a particular we do not say what it *is* but what category or law it comes under: '*Identity thinking* says what something falls under, or of what it is an example or a representative – and therefore is not itself.'²⁹⁵

Adorno thinks that by "identifying" an object we render it fixed and intransient and leave it open to manipulation. The concept is, thus, an *instrument* of domination: 'Concepts...are moments of the reality that require their formation, primarily for the control of nature'²⁹⁶

Adorno is claiming that concepts are instruments or tools because they are forged in and through the universal fungibility. He goes further than this, however, in claiming that this means through which we cognise the world around us actually *feeds into* and *determines* the condition of universal fungibility itself – sustaining and nurturing its development.

²⁹⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 149.

²⁹⁵ Adorno (1973) p. 149.

²⁹⁶ Adorno (1973) p. 23.

These claims raise a number of important issues. At one level, Adorno's concern here can be seen as very much connected to that of Marx. The critiques of both fetishism and identity thinking concern forms of thinking which are unable to grasp movement and potentiality and remain wedded to the status quo. Both are forms of critique which take the idea of social constitution to be central. . However, Adorno's account of *identity thinking* extends far beyond Marx's location of the problem of alienation at the level of the wage labour relation. Instead, it extends to the nature of concept formation itself. One interpretation of Adorno, which I deal with in the next section, accuses him pursuing a critique of the *concept itself* and claiming that to escape domination is to escape conceptualisation. Such a reliance upon an idealist philosophy of the subject would seem very much at odds with a commitment to the idea of social constitution. In contradistinction, I take Adorno to be offering an account of experience which, rather than rejecting conceptualism *per se* in favour of some aesthetic form of reason, locates the problem in a process of *rationalised* concept formation which disavows the somatic moment in cognition. By this I mean the attitudinal or bodily impact that objects have upon us. The problem is not with concepts *per se* but with a particular, rationalist epistemology, *identity thinking*, which Adorno takes to have become hegemonic in the modern world. I develop this claim in far more detail in the following chapter.

3. Habermas and Wellmer on Adorno

Adorno's adaptation of Weber and Marx paints a depressing picture of a world in which the commodification and instrumentalisation of human beings is near total. How can Adorno, therefore, proceed from this point without the certainty

of the Hegelian dialectic? To begin to address this question I turn to Habermas and Wellmer's critique.

3.1) The Charge of 'Performative Contradiction'

It is often contended that the difference between Habermas and Adorno ultimately derives from the former's greater enthusiasm for the liberating potential of the Enlightenment project. This impression is certainly one Habermas wants to maintain.²⁹⁷ Ultimately, however, this distinction seems to rest more on the political difference between Adorno's utopian Marxism and Habermas's willingness to accommodate certain features of a market economy and liberal democracy. As I will argue, Adorno frequently uses liberal ethical standards *emphatically*, in order to highlight way in which such values are distorted by their situatedness in the exchange society. In this sense, Adorno's expectations of Enlightenment are higher than those of Habermas. Philosophically, the difference lies in Adorno's refusal of any unimpeachable grounds for critique against Habermas's attempts to build ethical criterion upon the norms governing communicative action. Here then comes the crux of the issue. That Adorno and Horkheimer's refuse to adopt any systematic means of distinguishing between the progressive and destructive elements of Enlightenment thinking, whilst still defending its legacy, is said to result in

²⁹⁷ See Hullot-Kentor, 1989 p372,377. Hullot-Kentor, in his historical account of the reception of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, accuses Habermas of being responsible for many misconceptions of the text and its authorship, largely in order to preserve his own self-perceived role as torch-holder of the enlightenment. He also accuses Habermas of falling behind rationalists such as Kant (in the 3rd Critique) and Schiller in drawing such a rigid distinction between aesthetic and discursive reason. In this sense, it is Adorno whom is the true inheritor of Enlightenment.

'performative contradiction'.²⁹⁸

Adorno and Horkheimer's 'petitio principii' in the introduction to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is famously specified as follows:

We are wholly convinced...that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. Nevertheless...we have just as clearly recognised that the notion of this very way of thinking, no less than the actual historic forms, the social institutions, with which it is interwoven, already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today.²⁹⁹

In another passage, Adorno cites Wagner's 'Parsifal' as illustration, [R]eified and rationalized society... could become a society worthy of human beings...but only by applying its rationality to itself, in other words, only through a healing awareness of the marks of unreason in its own reason...[O]nly the spear that inflicted the wound can heal it.³⁰⁰

It does not appear that Habermas's objection to this strategy is that it is logically incoherent. As Deborah Cook argues, we often develop ethical standards out of the very conditions deemed to be bad...

Witnessing injustice committed in the name of justice (a monstrous commonplace today), critics must appeal to the very concept of justice in whose name injustice is perpetrated.³⁰¹

Habermas's concern seems to be a deeper one, that, in radically overestimating the extent of 'damaged life', Adorno has undermined the basis of his own claim to critical authority. Habermas claims that the genealogy of reason presented by Horkheimer and Adorno is 'astoundingly oversimplified'.³⁰² Adorno and Horkheimer are mistaken in that reason does not remain entirely subordinated to

²⁹⁸ Habermas (1988) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Polity, Cambridge) p. 119.

²⁹⁹ Adorno (1997) p. xiii.

³⁰⁰ Adorno (1993) p. 74.

³⁰¹ Cook (2003) p. 193.

³⁰² Habermas (1987) p. 112.

the dictates of instrumental rationality, especially in relation to its most recent products, modern science, universalistic ideas of justice, and morality and autonomous art. Note that both Adorno (explicitly) and Habermas (implicitly) accept that there is something nefarious about purposive reason. However, whereas, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer see science as having 'rejected any claim to theoretical knowledge in favour of technical utility,'³⁰³ Habermas considers science as having a specific dynamic which allows it to make claims beyond those that are technically useful. Whilst Adorno and Horkheimer consider the authority of ethical norms to have been destroyed by purposive rationality, Habermas sees the universalistic foundations of law and morality as fundamentally progressive and separate from their instrumental function. The problem, according to Habermas, is that Adorno and Horkheimer insist upon the Nietzschean claim that power and validity are inseparable: 'The critical capacity to take up a Yes or No stance and to distinguish between valid and invalid propositions is undermined as power and validity claims enter into a turbid fusion.'³⁰⁴

The critique of ideology is taken to the extent that context (genesis) and norm cannot be separated. The possibility of pursuing an immanent critique that can judge the irrationality of bourgeois society from the perspective of bourgeois norms themselves is eradicated, as those norms themselves become nothing more than expressions of the will to power.³⁰⁵ The root of this error is that Adorno and

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

³⁰⁵ Habermas seems to be suggesting here that immanent critique requires some sort of procedural separation of norms from their context so that they can be used to judge the world in which they are invoked. For Adorno's view of immanent critique see below.

Horkheimer fail to recognise that there are other types of reason other than instrumental reason, namely (for Habermas) communicative reason, which is anchored in the norms governing communicative action. By initiating a totalising critique of reason (rooted in the erroneous restriction of critical theory to the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness), Adorno and Horkheimer fail to grasp a potential basis from which critical theory can operate.

Outside the question of whether or not Habermas's own basis for critique is valid (something outside the scope of this thesis), I will make a couple of preliminary responses. Firstly, Adorno makes no claim to have unimpeachable foundations for his critical theory. Indeed, whilst relations of domination persist, the world cannot be wholly rationally intelligible and hence such foundations are impossible. For Habermas, therefore, to develop his own quasi-transcendental critical apparatus is a supremely ideological gesture. Simon Jarvis usefully sums up the difference between first and second generation Critical Theorists as follows. The second generation critical theorists want to ground a model of social conflict in a theory of communication, 'the theory of communication is the grounding element, the model of social conflict is what is grounded'.³⁰⁶ Adorno, conversely, develops a theory of the *entanglement* of communication and domination, which cannot itself be grounded in a theory of communication. Thus, Adorno cannot accept a separation (even for analytical or procedural purposes) between communication and social conflict.

Secondly, although Adorno cannot claim immunity from his situatedness within the exchange society,³⁰⁷ he can argue that, as a philosopher and musicologist, he is more immune to such effects than those in disciplines more

³⁰⁶ Jarvis (1998) p. 36.

³⁰⁷ Incidentally, neither can Habermas. See Cook, 2003.

directly in the service of capital accumulation.³⁰⁸ Indeed, the practices which Adorno appeals to, for example love, art or philosophy, are those which stand in the greatest degree of opposition to the universal fungibility. Adorno tends to locate 'the good' in practices which can still attest to the damage to ethical practices through the universalisation of exchange. *Minima Moralia*, for example, traces the (still visible) erosion of human experience within many practices that have become a refuge for ethical life, on the fringes of the exchange society.³⁰⁹

In this context, the practice of critical theory can, although not immune from the distortions of the exchange society, be seen to have a certain degree of autonomy. This requires that we take Adorno's thinking to have a higher degree of critical authority than those forms of thought which are bound up with the reproduction of the capitalist market, for example positivist sociology or economics. Critical Theory sees itself as 'serving no alien purpose' in that it plays no functional role in the social whole (it is not concerned with reforming this or that part). It is autonomous from the whole in that, although it *arises* from the social structure, it *points entirely* towards its future transformation.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Here Adorno seemingly distances himself from Marx's 'Theses on Feurbach' – 'All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice' (Marx, 1992). However, Adorno tends to view music and philosophy as highly specialised forms of 'labour' – in the sense that both are concerned by the transformation of materials objectively laid down by tradition (see Jarvis, 1998 p45) . Thus, Adorno neglects the traditional spheres of practice considered by most Marxists (strikes, demonstrations, political intervention) whilst simultaneously widening the sphere of practice itself.

³⁰⁹ See, for example, Bernstein, 2002 Ch.2.

³¹⁰ See Theunissen, p245.'Critical Theory serves no alien purposes, because the praxis towards

3.2) The Disavowal of Discursive Reason?

There is, however, a more fundamental criticism to be made of Adorno by both Habermas and Wellmer. I shall develop this critique through Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1* through to Wellmer's *Persistence of Modernity*.

Habermas's first critique of Adorno is orientated around his relationship to Lukacs. Firstly, Lukacs (like Marx) begins with the specific form of capitalist social relations, namely the wage-labour relation characterised by the commodity form of labour power exchanged within a capitalist economic system. Reified consciousness can be explained only by reference to this specific historical relationship.³¹¹ For Adorno, reified consciousness is only one historical manifestation of a universal characteristic of (hitherto existing) human history, *identity thinking*. Such thinking attains universal significance through capitalist relations of exchange but does *not* have its genesis in them. Secondly, following what Habermas describes as an 'idealist retranslation of the concept of reification into the philosophy of consciousness',³¹² Adorno (re)anchors thought to the context of its reproduction by rooting reified consciousness in the self-preservation of the subject in the face of external nature. Hence, reification is given an anthropological foundation, which, furthermore, is set in terms of subject-object relations (i.e. man and nature). In other words, reification is identified with the instrumental control of what is other to the subject, the attempt to 'annex the alien',³¹³ by placing it under the ambit of the subjects'

which it points is only the fruition of the praxis that is Critical Theory itself'.

³¹¹ See Lukacs (1968) *History and Class Consciousness* (Merlin, London) pp. 83-110.

³¹² Habermas (1984) p. 378.

³¹³ Adorno (1973) p. 191.

comprehension/control. Finally, domination over things and over other people is taken to have emerged from the domination of nature and seen to have an *identical structure*. Therefore, the concept of reification is generalised both temporally and substantively.

As Habermas argues, we now have a notion of reification (what Adorno describes as '*identity thinking*') that is exceptionally broad, covering discursive or conceptual thinking *per se*. All such thinking (or perhaps *all thinking*) is conceived as being a means of dominating and manipulating external nature. However, for Adorno to talk of *identity thinking* pejoratively he must posit an original or imagined reconciliation between man and the world. In other words, Adorno must appeal to some non-instrumental relationship with the world whilst simultaneously making the claim that reason both *has been* historically and *is* substantively instrumental. In doing so, Adorno directs us towards the non-identical, that which evades conceptualisation and cannot be grasped discursively. Reconciliation between man and nature can be conceived only mimetically, as some form of somatic impulse, and not through conceptual thinking. This aporia is the source of Habermas's anxiety with Adorno's position. How can such impulses be transformed into thoughts or insights?

...[I]f thought is always tied to operations that have no specifiable meaning outside the bounds of instrumental reason, all the more so today when, with the triumphal procession of instrumental reason, the reification of consciousness seems to have become universal?³¹⁴

Habermas acknowledges that Adorno is fully aware of this aporia in his thinking. By the time he wrote *Negative Dialectics*, Habermas claims that Adorno conceived of critical theory as an 'exercise' or a 'drill'.³¹⁵ Negative

³¹⁴ Habermas (1984) p. 384.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 385.

dialectic serves only to exhibit a glimmer of the 'aporetic nature of the concept of the non-identical',³¹⁶ unthinkable without conceptual thought yet also outside thinking. Such a glimmer can be attained only through an aesthetic mode of presentation of philosophy or, more profoundly, in works of modern art which escape instrumentalisation (properly interpreted through a correct aesthetic theory).

Although Habermas acknowledges that Adorno is fully conscious of the aporia at the heart of his philosophy he finds it deeply unsatisfactory:

A philosophy that withdraws behind the lines of discursive thought to the mindfulness of nature pays for the wakening powers of its exercises by renouncing the goal of theoretical knowledge, and thus by renouncing that program of interdisciplinary materialism in whose name the critical theory of society was launched in the early thirties.³¹⁷

The reason for this failure is that critical theory remained within the 'philosophy of consciousness', a monological relationship of subject and object. The claim here, therefore, is not that Adorno lacks unimpeachable foundations for his thinking but that he misfires fundamentally in his choice of target.

Wellmer, in the *Persistence of Modernity*, develops this critique further. For Adorno, according to Wellmer, the 'proton pseudos' of discursive reason lies in the generality of concepts, that they 'identify things that do not go by the same name'.³¹⁸ Adorno's problem with conceptual thinking is that it prearranges or fixes the meaning of its content. Wellmer's contention is that the problems Adorno identifies with conceptual knowing and the demand for a 'reflexive, non-

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Wellmer (1991) *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics and Postmodernism* translated by David Midgely (Oxford: Polity Press) p. 71.

reifying' language can be met without the negativity of Adorno's philosophical position. Having to 'conjure up' a notion of reconciliation between man and nature is not, according to Wellmer, philosophically necessary.³¹⁹

Wellmer identifies a paradox in Adorno's position. What we normally refer to as 'true', linguistic propositions (S is P), are considered by Adorno to be false. This is because, as I have said, the generality of conceptual knowing violates the integrity of the non-identical. However, this means that Adorno can no longer set this *emphatic* sense of 'truth' (his claim that we miss something in standard linguistic propositions) in any relation to what we normally mean when we speak of 'truth or 'falsity'. Furthermore, as Wellmer argues, we have no basis upon which to claim that the generality of concepts violates the non-identical except to make a fairly trivial claim that (general) linguistic signs do not (in themselves) express the particular circumstances of their use. Wellmer claims that Adorno goes wrong here in making a judgement about language from outside, confined to monological subject-object relations.

If we apply the metaphors of prearranging and truncating to language as a whole, then they reveal an intentionalist prejudgement about language; in fact they reveal, as can easily be seen, a naturalistic variant of the philosophy of the subject-as-constitutive-of-meaning.³²⁰

Wellmer accepts that this is not the intention of Adorno's project, that Adorno repeatedly emphasised the fact that all thought is linguistically mediated, but argues that his critique of *the* identificatory concept achieves precisely the opposite. It unwittingly lends itself to an idealist philosophy of the subject whereby the way in which we conceptualise the world is seen as being constitutive of the world itself. Adorno wants to posit an intimate connection

³¹⁹ Ibid p. 72.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

between 'cognition and action' whereby the violence committed to the non-identical by the generality of concepts is also violence committed against the human and natural world. By fixing and objectifying meanings and making them immutable, thinking also objectifies social relations themselves. Furthermore, discursive reason, defined in terms of '*identity thinking*', cannot but disavow sensuous nature by virtue of its abstract generality. The conclusion of Adorno's argument is thus...

Adorno can only conceive of the better Other of the instrumental *Spirit* as a world beyond discursive reason, and he can only conceive of a non-violent organisation of society in terms of nature as a whole achieving a state of redemption.³²¹

According to Wellmer's interpretation, Adorno must insist that the Other to *identity thinking* is something beyond language (presumably some form of aesthetic rationality). As I have said, where Wellmer thinks Adorno is mistaken is in seeing the problem as one *with* rather than *within* language. If he were to traverse the latter route he could begin to grasp the problems of prearranging or truncating meaning as problems with *particular uses* of language as opposed to problems with language itself. Wellmer pursues this argument in providing examples of instances in which specific forms of language use can demonstrate concretely the sense in which the generality of concepts can violate the non-identical. However, these arguments proceed within the boundaries of language itself and not from the outside.

In summation, Wellmer worries that Adorno's critique of identificatory reason threatens to reject reason altogether in favour of a 'true' (presumably aesthetic) mode of reasoning which is the 'other' of discursive reasoning. Subsequently, Adorno threatens to reject history (his utopianism being so radically negativistic)

³²¹ Ibid., p. 74.

and to offer no basis from which he can locate the potential transformation of society. If Wellmer is right, this would appear to strongly challenge Adorno's commitment to a notion of social constitution, presenting him instead as a rather mystical utopian. How, then are we to respond to Wellmer's critique?

Jay Bernstein, in his 2002 work *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* rightly objects that Wellmer has very much misunderstood Adorno's position. Bernstein thinks that two factors are likely to be influencing Wellmer's interpretation of Adorno as maintaining a position 'outside language' (and thus outside history). Firstly, whilst Adorno maintains that all conceptual judgements (S is P) are linguistically mediated (we only know S or P through their linguistic equivalents) a *purely* linguistic analysis misses something in understanding the cognitive act. This, Adorno thinks, is the experiential aspect of cognition, presumably the somatic or impulsive moment of knowing. Bernstein concedes, '[T]o that extent [Adorno] does remain within a philosophy of consciousness'.³²² Secondly, Adorno's defence of the rhetorical aspect of language³²³ seemingly dismisses standard conceptual judgements (which violate the content they attempt to capture) instead defending the expressive and performative aspects of language. This, Bernstein argues, leads Wellmer to think that Adorno's non-identical is the (presumably aesthetic) 'other' of conceptual thinking.

Bernstein, however, thinks that this line of argument is not open to Adorno. Here he begins simplistically. Consider a standard assertion, 'the chair is red', and a rhetorical statement, 'the chair is red like a plum tomato!' As both have the same inferential core, Bernstein claims that Adorno cannot think that there is something intrinsic to all conceptual thinking, which violates its content.

³²² Bernstein (2002) p. 268.

³²³ '[T]he rhetorical aspect is on the side of content' Adorno (1973) p. 56.

Adorno's claim is, instead, that the latter directs our attention towards the experiential content of concepts whereas the former is merely neutral. Against Wellmer...

The content to be rescued through rhetorical reorientation is not the other of conceptual understanding but that part of the content of the concept which is passed over and abstracted from in the disenchantment of the world and the rationalisation of reason; it is the suppressed mimetic moment of the concept.³²⁴

As our conceptual apparatus is rationalised through the growing prevalence of instrumental reason, this mimetic aspect of the concept (which allows us to communicate reflexively with the content of a concept) is suppressed. Adorno's notion of identity thinking refers to a socio-historical process, which forges concepts into a formal and immutable system and disconnects them from their mimetic aspect. Furthermore, far from calling for the adoption of an 'aesthetic' form of reason and the abandonment of discursive thinking, Adorno (as I shall argue in the final chapter) is merely giving an account of how reason works. In disavowing the somatic aspect to cognition, reason becomes impoverished.

4. Immanent Critique?

So far I have claimed that not only do Habermas and Wellmer frequently misread Adorno's position but, also, that their criticisms of Adorno are frequently grounded in precisely the sort of hypostasised distinctions which Adorno's 'negative dialectic' seeks to undermine. Whereas Habermas and Wellmer distinguish between intersubjective theories of communication and the philosophy of consciousness, Adorno takes such a distinction to disavow the very mediations that make language and communication possible. As a self-proclaimed materialist thinker, Adorno takes any philosophy which leaves the

³²⁴ Bernstein (2002) p. 273.

somatic out of reason to be wedded to idealism. I develop this claim more fully in Chapter Five. Furthermore, whereas Habermas wants to distinguish between a theory of communication, which delivers certain universalistic norms, and an understanding of domination, Adorno recognises no such distinction. Instead, Adorno is interested in the interplay between forms of domination and the way in which social norms are constituted. However, without the procedural separation of norm and genesis indicated by Habermas, how can Adorno's critique break through the apparently all encompassing ideology of the exchange society? To begin to develop an answer to this questions, I think it is necessary to return to Hegel, as it is through the Hegelian notion of immanent critique that Adorno is to be better understood. This, I think, places him even further from the transcendental Kantianism of Habermas.

4.1) Immanent Critique in Hegel

For Hegel, it is not the task of the philosopher to give instruction as to what one 'ought' to do. He derides the Kantian construction of moral maxims as 'an empty game, now amusing, now more serious, now pleasing, now dangerous'.³²⁵ Instead, the task of the philosopher is to interpret and comprehend the rules which are implicit in the practices and institutions of the community in which we inhabit. This is what is normally meant by immanent critique, famously encapsulated in Hegel's double-dictum.

What is rational is actual;

and what is actual is rational.³²⁶

³²⁵ Hegel (1991) p. 14.

³²⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

This does not mean that Hegel is a moral or legal positivist, as Popper accuses him of being. Hegel's choice of technical terms here is deliberate, 'actuality' as opposed to 'existence'. He defines Actuality as the 'unity of essence with Existence.'³²⁷ Actuality can either refer to a practice or institution which has flourished in accordance with its essence or a general condition in which reason emerges through tangible institutional forms.

To decipher the actuality of an institution or practice one has to understand its inner dynamic. Those practices and institutions which exist for good reason, those which essentially maintain and promote human freedom (as Hegel understands it), will triumph in the unfolding of history whilst those with no rational purpose will wither away. The latter are consigned to the category of 'lazy existence'. For example, we may take the essence of democratic institutions to be fair representation of a population with protection for minorities but consider some of the contingent features of such institutions (e.g. hereditary peerages or pompous forms of address in the House of Commons) to be part of 'lazy existence'. Such institutions have actuality when they have realised their essence in practice. The philosopher, far from being impotent in such circumstances, is to comprehend and promote the actuality of institutions and practices in order to advance the process of flourishing actuality.³²⁸

³²⁷ Hegel (1991) p. 213. 'Actuality is the unity, become immediate of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer.'

³²⁸ Some institutions, as I argued in Chapter Two, will never reach actuality. A market economy, for example, is actual only when it universally provides for the material needs of a population (this is its 'essence' or purpose). However, markets cause structural inequality and poverty of necessity. Hegel's response to this is a rather stoical one, that the market is the best system that we are going to get and that its failings should deal with its failings as best as we can.

The latter part of Hegel's double dictum makes the epistemological claim that we have no access to forms of rationality which are not embedded in practices and institutions. This follows from the Hegelian notion of 'necessary embodiment' (see above). Reason must be embodied in language, tradition, history etc for it to be intelligible. Again in response to Kant, Hegel thinks that moral maxims that are abstractly formulated outside the actual practices of flesh-and-blood humans are unintelligible.

4.2) Adorno's notion of Immanent Critique

Adorno accepts this speculative identification of actual and rational to the extent that, as I have already claimed, he does not believe reason to be located in some transcendental schema, nor some aesthetic realm outside history. Instead of engaging in external critique, starting from first principles, criticism takes place on the basis of principles which institutions and practices conspicuously endorse. Adorno, therefore, takes the liberal legitimating beliefs of modern capitalism, free and equal exchange, rights and freedom, in order to claim that such ethical beliefs cannot be realised within the terms of capitalism.³²⁹ In *emphatically* using such concepts he hopes to push them to their logical conclusions, outside the framework in which they were originally conceived. Adorno, therefore, seeks to use immanent critique in order to condemn the irrationality of the modern social world rather than to develop a Hegelian theodicy.

Take, for example, the 19th Century liberal notion of free and equal exchange.

³²⁹ As I will explain below, this is not merely a case of demonstrating internal inconsistency – as in Marx's critique of exploitation – but involves a qualitative transformation of the norms invoked.

Such a notion, whereby we are equally free to sell our labour and purchase within capitalist mechanisms of exchange, is contradicted by the basic inequality underlying a capitalist system, whereby the means of production are in the ownership of a small minority. For Adorno, the ideological notion of free and equal exchange, conceals this basic inequality but also contains within it an implicit claim to real equality. Such a claim, however, can be realised only through common ownership of the means of production and an end to capitalism.

Matters do not rest here, however, as the notion of equality itself must undergo a qualitative transformation through such a critique. As we have seen, it is not merely the 'lie' of free and equal exchange that Adorno finds problematic. It is the very nature of equivalence between non-identical commodities and human beings mediated through the medium of money. Furthermore, it is precisely this fetishism of commodities and human labour, which, for Adorno, binds people so closely to the status quo. Therefore, the notion of equality to emerge through Adorno's critique of universal exchange must recognise the non-identity of particulars.

There is a second sense in which Adorno is employing an immanent critique of the exchange principle, from the point of view of a commodity's use-value. The implicit claim of the market to meet human wants is undermined by the subsumption of use-value by exchange value and the production of exchange value for its own sake. Here, Adorno engages in immanent critique. However, Adorno does not want to defend 'use-values' against 'exchange-values', as conceptualising human labour purely in terms of its 'use value' reduces it to an object to be manipulated. Again, immanent critique, whilst partially adopting the ethical standards of liberal capitalism, must result in the qualitative

transformation of such standards themselves.

4.3) The Limits of Immanent Critique

In this important sense, Adorno can be seen to be following a (albeit far more radicalised) Hegelian strategy of tracing the rational in the actual, actuality being the conspicuous ethical claims used to legitimate capitalism yet simultaneously denied in its operation. In fact, in a broader sense, the intentions expressed in the opening of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, to judge the enlightenment project in terms of its own claims to be able to deliver us from fear and ignorance would appear to be paradigmatic of such a strategy. However, there are a number of problems with Adorno taking up such an approach. Firstly, as I have argued, Adorno wants to claim not only that the legitimating beliefs of liberal capitalism are incoherent, that they are untenable within the capitalist system they legitimate, but that they are morally defective. Hence, the notions of freedom and equality which Adorno implicitly appeals to are qualitatively different from the narrow, legalistic form they take in (crude) liberalism. As I have already argued, Adorno has a very sophisticated means of being able to transform the use of concepts outside their original context through tracing their metalogical references (see Chapter Three, Section One). However, it is questionable that such a critique of liberal ideology can illuminate any more than the internal inconsistency of such concepts. It does not tell us why what is legitimated is morally wrong and why the ethical implications of Adorno's thinking are morally right.³³⁰ Therefore, Adorno's immanent critique must be supplemented with a

³³⁰ The Truth status of moral claims is essential for Adorno. Such Truth status cannot merely be reduced to a coherent development of liberal norms in and against their contradictory relationship to capitalist mechanisms, 'Truth is objective not plausible' (Adorno (1973) p. 42). See Chapter Five for a fuller account of Adorno's ethical ethics.

more substantial ethical theory. I deal with this in the next chapter³³¹.

Secondly, against Hegel, Adorno does not think that the modern social world is essentially worthy of being 'a home'. Whereas Hegel sets himself the easier task of illuminating and promoting the actuality of an essentially rational world order, Adorno occupies a world in which there are few (if any) traces of goodness left. Rational enlightenment has become reduced to mythology (see above) and situatedness within the exchange society damages and distorts what ethical practices remain. In other words, in Hegel we are presented with a fundamentally rational world, geared towards the promotion of human self-determination but beset by the contingent problems of war and poverty. In Adorno we are presented with a fundamentally irrational world which systematically thwarts human freedom and within which genuine ethical practices have all but been extinguished.

As I have argued, however, Adorno agrees with Hegel to the extent that he does not think that critique can be levelled from some external position. That the rational is actual requires that sources of normativity, however distorted, be located in actual social practices and institutions. This means that Adorno cannot be purely 'negative' and has to latch on to fleeting fragments of the good in, as he puts it in *Minima Moralia*, their 'alienated form'. For Michael Theunissen,³³² this leads him into contradictory positions. Adorno begins with a conception of a world of 'radical evil'.³³³ However, he also wants to claim that '[C]onsciousness

³³¹ The theory outline also meets the criterion of 'immanent critique' in that the resources it draws upon are immanent to the structure of experience. See Chapter Five.

³³² Theunissen, Michael (1999) "Society and History: A Critique of Critical Theory" in Dews, Peter (ed) Habermas; A Critical Reader (Oxford, Blackwell)

³³³ Adorno (1973) p. 374.

could not even despair over the grey, did it not harbour the notion of a different colour, whose dispersed traces are not absent in the negative whole'.³³⁴

Simon Jarvis responds to Theunissen's claims in 'Adorno; A Critical Introduction', firstly addressing the hermeneutic status of Adorno's claims. Jarvis claims that we cannot take Adorno too literally. This is not because Adorno glosses over the problem of contradiction by appealing to an 'aestheticised reason, which removes contradiction by suggesting that one limb of a contradictory pair was not meant literally' (Ibid). Instead, Adorno thinks that to make despair into an absolute is unthinkable. Jarvis insists that Adorno's thinking is speculative in the Hegelian sense. Hegel's claim that speculative thinking can see 'the rose in the cross of the present' is echoed in Adorno's claim that 'dispersed traces' of colour are 'not absent from the negative whole.' For Adorno, '[e]very line which if read with sheer literal-mindedness speaks despair, *bespeaks hope*'.³³⁵ Adorno thinks that we *cannot* read claims of the first type without hearing claims of the second within them. In other words, a 'pure' negativism could not be expounded because it is unthinkable.

Here we must return to the question of how reliant Adorno is upon Hegelian metaphysics. I have argued that, for Hegel, determinate negation always delivers a positive result. Negation logically generates new content, the development of higher forms of consciousness and self-determination. Hence Hegel's optimistic strategy of reading the rational in the actual can only confirm the triumphant march of reason. As I argued in Chapter Three, this is behind Adorno's rejection of the negation of the negation. However, does Jarvis's suggestion that, for Adorno, '[e]very line which if read with sheer literal-mindedness speaks despair,

³³⁴ Adorno (1973) pp. 377-8.

³³⁵ Jarvis (1998) p. 214.

bespeaks hope' not bring Adorno closer to a Hegelian position? Consider the following quotations.

[Freedom] can only be grasped in determinate negation in accordance with the concrete shape of unfreedom.³³⁶

[T]he false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better.³³⁷

Is Adorno not pursuing a Hegelian strategy of reading the positive in the negative? Adorno can certainly be seen to vacillate on this issue. For example, he clearly states that, contra Hegel, the non-identical is not 'obtainable by a negation of the negative'.³³⁸ All negation delivers is 'criticism',³³⁹ that is *knowledge of the bad*. This is not only an issue with his philosophical treatment of Hegel but also with his more general account of the status of hope in the post-Auschwitz world. Take the following passage, for example, in comparison with those quoted above.

After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate. And these feelings do have an objective side after events that make a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence.³⁴⁰

There are a number of issues at work here. Firstly, there does seem to be a general vacillation in Adorno between an understanding of the world as evil *all*

³³⁶ Adorno (1973) p. 231.

³³⁷ Adorno (1998) p. 288.

³³⁸ Adorno (1973) p. 158.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³⁴⁰ Adorno (1973) p. 361.

the way down and an understanding of the world dominated by the nefarious logic of the 'iron cage' but with pockets of goodness at the margins for example in acts of resistance, spontaneous kindness or artistic creativity.³⁴¹ Overall, however, Adorno can be seen to be far more disposed towards the former position in light of the extraordinary brutality of his times and the absence of any reasonable alternative. Secondly, however, there is also the question of what Adorno means by negation and its relationship with Hegel's usage. On the one hand, Adorno *is* using the word 'negation' in a Hegelian sense. It refers not to non-being but to something existent that negates something that should not be. In other words, Adorno's philosophical negativism aims not towards a limitless scepticism (a negation of all positive content) but towards the *determinate negation of existing negativity*, i.e. the mutually supportive nexus of *identity thinking* and relations of domination. When, therefore, Adorno talks of a 'negative dialectic', it is not really negative or, at least, *it is only negative from the point of view of that which it is trying to negate*. However, as I shall try to illustrate below, Adorno's notion of determinate negation is qualitatively different from that of Hegel's in that it can only *hint* at a *not yet existing* good rather than read the rational in the actual. This demand leads Adorno to sources outside the framework of German Idealism. Therefore, in order to understand Adorno's notion of determinate negation more thoroughly I want to, firstly, examine his secularisation of the Judaic image ban and, secondly, his appropriation of Walter Benjamin's notion of the constellation.

³⁴¹ For the former view see the passage above in addition to Adorno (1973) p. 361. The latter view can be best seen in *Minima Moralia*, in its withdrawal into the individual sphere. See Adorno (1974) pp. 15-20.

4.4) *The Bilderverbot*

Key to understanding Adorno's notion of determinate negation is the *Bilderverbot*. Adorno makes frequent references to the Judaic ban on graven images throughout his work.³⁴² In theological terms, the ban preserves a divide between the divine and material and warns against the corporealisation of the Godhead.

Adorno's use of the *Bilderverbot* is idiosyncratic. Firstly, it can be seen to be broadly concurrent with the Marxist refusal to picture utopia.³⁴³ This refusal can be seen to stem from the importance Marxists place upon the idea of collective self-creation as an end in itself. If the Marxist critique of alienation highlights our experience of capitalist society as a world operating above our heads and beyond our control, then it would appear self-defeating for Marxists to *prescribe* or *dictate* a blueprint for a future society. Secondly, the *Bilderverbot* does not, as in its religious usage, mean sectioning off the divine as a pure, ineffable realm of experience. Instead, as Elizabeth Pritchard argues, it is better viewed as a means through which Adorno can illuminate the *hellishness* of the world.³⁴⁴ Utopia has to be projected so far from our ken because the world is so infected with evil. Thus, it acts as a speculative position from which we can scrutinise the reasons for the fallen state of the world. Furthermore, in denying immediate access to a transcendent realm, Adorno strengthens the ethical imperatives of utopian thinking. The absence of proximity between utopia and the context of immanence underlines the uncompleted nature of the project to be achieved and

³⁴² Adorno (1973) p. 207/402 and (1997) pp. 23-4.

³⁴³ Adorno (1973) p. 299.

³⁴⁴ Pritchard (2002) p. 185.

the level of work to be done.³⁴⁵

Adorno is concerned that the *Bilderverbot* is often invoked as an ahistorical invariant and hence descends towards negative theology.³⁴⁶ Adorno is fully aware of the political liability of the *Bilderverbot* being employed in this way, alluding to an unreachable utopian state, unconnected to the concrete material reasons underlining the absence of its proximity. His treatment of Kant, in this respect, is instructive.

Adorno often treats the theological questions raised by the *Bilderverbot* as akin to the philosophical questions raised by Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena.³⁴⁷ This way of reading Kant, he shares with Walter Benjamin. It was no accident that Kantianism was Walter Benjamin's most fundamental philosophical frame of reference, far more so than Adorno whom Scholem described as a 'Jewish Heretic' as a consequence of his Hegelian leanings.³⁴⁸ For both Walter Benjamin and Adorno the *Bilderverbot* is important in terms of the preservation of the transcendent (the refusal to reduce utopia to the terms of reference of the *status quo*) and a weariness at remaining within a corrupt and disfigured immanence. It is here where the Judaism of each seems most apparent.

However, Adorno also describes the Kantian 'block' as 'terroristic'.³⁴⁹ As I argued in Chapter Three, the block on transcendence is read as a contingent feature of a society structured by commodity fetishism. Invoking the

³⁴⁵ See Pritchard (2002) p. 187.

³⁴⁶ Negative theology eludes to a God which we can never discursively grasp.

³⁴⁷ Adorno (1973) p. 388.

³⁴⁸ Kaufman (2000) p. 179.

³⁴⁹ Adorno (1973) pp. 388-9.

Bilderverbot, thus, does not require maintaining an ahistorical ban on reaching the transcendent. It only underlines how far we are from reaching it.

5. Models

How are we then, to go beyond the image ban? The discussion so far has highlighted two related problems regarding the nature of the content generated by Adorno's version of determinate negation. Firstly, such content cannot be wholly discursive, bound by the logic of *identity thinking*, as this would bind it to the rationale of the exchange society and hence to the context of immanence. Secondly, such content cannot be 'positive', in the sense of providing a 'blueprint' of the good, as such notions are, as yet, not wholly accessible. Below I look at three models which Adorno explores in order to clarify his notion of a 'negative dialectic'.

5.1) Atonalism

As Wiggershaus documents, Adorno's 1941 manuscript for the 'Philosophy of Modern Music' was widely admired by Horkheimer and was to greatly inform their later collaborative work on philosophical matters.³⁵⁰ Focusing largely on Schoenberg's determinate negation of tonality, the work gives us many clues as to Adorno's conception of the dialectic.

Schoenberg, Adorno argues, takes the logic of tonality to the point of its dialectical reversal. Out of the extreme chromaticism of Wagner's 'Tristan and Isolde', Schoenberg develops a form of composition which systematically undermines the domination of the tonic. Twelve Tone composition begins with a 'note row' comprised of a sequence of the 12 notes of the octave in which no note may be repeated until all others have been played. This 'note row' forms the

³⁵⁰ Wiggershaus (1994) p. 298.

basis of the composition, subject to various forms of variation including inversion (where a mirror image of the 'note row' is played, retrogression (where the 'note row' is played backwards) and retrograde inversion (where the 'note row is both mirrored and reversed).

Superficially, it may appear that what attracts Adorno to atonal music is that, in overcoming the domination of the tonic and allowing each note equal weight in musical composition, it anticipates the hoped-for end to social domination. As Adorno writes to Krenek,

Doesn't this [Schoenberg's music]...have something to do with that which in Marx is called the association of Free Men? ³⁵¹

If this is so, however, Adorno is surely breaking his own prescription of the *Bilderverbot*, going beyond mere ideology-critique and alluding to a blueprint of the good-life. In an essay on Schoenberg's 'Moses and Aron', Adorno clarifies his position.

The element of truth in...[Schoenberg's music] is that by defining itself as negative, his approach thereby assumes positivity. But its existence is not guaranteed through such postulation. It is a reflex action toward a false reality, an *inverted reflection* of that reality in consciousness; it does not exist in and for itself. As a chimera it remains marked by the false. ³⁵²

Thus, the dialectical reversal achieved through Schoenberg's development of tonal music is only a chimerical 'inverted reflection' of a false world. It does not discursively map out the good nor does it present its attainability as guaranteed.

There is, however, a more important point regarding Adorno's relationship to Schoenberg. It is important to remember that Adorno does not see Twelve Tone

³⁵¹ Letter to Krenek, Oct 7th 1934 quoted in Buck-Morss (1977) p. 130.

³⁵² Adorno (1992) 'Quasi una Fantasia', translated by Rodney Livingstone (Verso, London) p. 236.

composition as good 'in-itself' and is highly dismissive of many of its proponents.³⁵³ The refusal to submit to diatonic harmonic restrictions, for Adorno, parallels the refusal of autonomous reason to tolerate anything outside itself. The proclaimed 'newness' of Twelve Tone composition is parallel to the claims of Enlightenment to have liberated itself from Mythology. For Adorno, such claims to liberation can be contested only on the grounds of the relationship of 'the new' to what it claims to have distanced itself from. As we have seen, in regards to the claims of autonomous reason, the very mediations through which reason itself can subsist are disavowed in this process. In Schoenberg, however, elements of tradition are preserved (for example classical or archaic techniques of variation)³⁵⁴ and radically transformed rather than neglected. As Jarvis comments,

What crucially distinguishes the really new from the abstract novelty...of commodity production in the cultural industry is that the really new work is made in undiminished awareness of the *possibilities afforded* by tradition rather than by a simple *forgetting* of tradition.³⁵⁵

Hence, in many ways, Schoenberg's relationship to diatonic and pre-diatonic traditions provides a model of Adorno's conception of determinate negation.

5.2) Constellations - Benjamin's 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue'

Outside atonal music, it is the philosophy of Walter Benjamin that most inspires Adorno to deviate from the Hegelian model of dialectic. Both Benjamin and Adorno face a similar problem, the possibility of using of concepts to go beyond

³⁵³ Adorno (1973) *Philosophy of Modern Music* translated by A. Mitchell and W. Blomster (Continuum, New York) p. 70.

³⁵⁴ Adorno (1992) pp. 269-322.

³⁵⁵ Jarvis (1998) p. 136 (my emphasis).

the limitations of conceptual thinking. For Benjamin it is the 'fate of phenomena in the hands of concepts'³⁵⁶ and not the issue of conceptuality per se that distinguishes philosophical truth from mere cognitive knowledge. In the latter, concepts act as instruments to analyse phenomena and, hence, necessarily fail to capture their particularity. In the former, a multiplicity of concepts play a mediating role in (to use Benjamin's phrase) 'redeeming'³⁵⁷ the irreducible particularity of phenomena. Benjamin's notion of philosophical truth emerging through a constellation of concepts, I will argue, is integral to an understanding of Adorno's critique of *Identity thinking*.

As I have suggested, Adorno's relationship to Benjamin's thought is all the more interesting in light of Benjamin's anti-Hegelianism.³⁵⁸ As Rosen notes, Benjamin is firmly within the Kantian paradigm in the broad sense of being interested in the 'distinctiveness of certain types of experience'.³⁵⁹ In other words, he is less interested in investigating the nature of reality in itself but in the way in which it is experienced. Whilst he shares this broad concern with Kant, he does not want to restrict the notion of experience to the formal categorising of sense-images under formal rules but to consider other, non-rationalistic and often avowedly mystical forms of experience. Fundamental to Benjamin's project is the notion of a tacit, 'mimetic' form of shared experience.³⁶⁰

Against this backdrop, Benjamin develops his notion of a constellation in the 'Epistemo-critical prologue' to his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Benjamin

³⁵⁶ Buck-Morss (1978) p. 90.

³⁵⁷ Benjamin, Walter (1977) *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London, NLB) p15.

³⁵⁸ See Jay, Martin (1984) *Adorno* (Cambridge, Harvard) p. 246.

³⁵⁹ Rosen (1996) p. 236.

³⁶⁰ Adorno also appeals to the notion of mimesis (see Chapter Five).

begins with something like the Kantian distinction between 'Ideas', the Kantian pure concepts of reason, and 'concepts', the Kantian categories of the understanding. For Benjamin, the former stand on the side of 'philosophical truth' and the latter on the side of 'knowledge'. There is also something of Plato in Benjamin's discussion, the timelessness³⁶¹ of the constellations resembling Plato's absolute transcendental forms. Against Jameson³⁶² who claims that the heritage of such terms is a distraction to grasping Benjamin's intention, it is precisely this dialectical relationship to the history of philosophy that impressed Adorno.³⁶³

Firstly, what distinguishes 'concepts' and 'ideas' is that, whereas 'concepts' merely capture a fleeting aspect of empirical reality, 'ideas', as a cluster of concepts surrounding an object, can illuminate particular phenomena from many angles. Concepts, therefore, are not bypassed but obtain a different, *mediating* function to that employed in cognitive knowledge.

Through their mediating role concepts enable phenomena to participate in the existence of ideas. It is this same mediating role which fits them for the other equally basic task of philosophy, the representation of ideas.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Benjamin (1977) p. 34.

³⁶² Jameson (1990) *Late Marxism* (Verso, London) p. 53.

³⁶³ See Buck-Morss 1977 p. 95. Benjamin later admits that he invokes Platonism for strategic purposes, to head off a 'lapse into immanence' (Adorno and Benjamin (1999) p261). Plato never reappears in his work as a significant point of reference. He does, however, often refer to 'The Name' for similar strategic reasons. 'The Name' is grounded in the word of God and constitutes the basis of all knowledge. After the fall, however, the connection between Name and word is split. Constellations are one way through which the original power of 'The Name' can be recuperated.

³⁶⁴ Benjamin (1977) p. 34.

Secondly, comes the analogy with constellations.

Ideas are to objects as constellations to stars. This means that, in the first place, they are neither there concepts or their laws.³⁶⁵

Ideas, for Benjamin, are the network of concepts surrounding phenomena as opposed to the concepts themselves.

Thirdly, whereas 'concepts' (in cognitive knowledge) impose a subjective conceptual framework upon disparate phenomena, 'ideas' are formed out of the affinities between the phenomena itself.³⁶⁶ The construction of constellations is, thus, radically anti-idealistic, inverting the Platonic notion of ideas:

If Platonic ideas were absolute transcendental forms whose likeness appeared within the empirical objects as a pale reflection of their own eternal truth, Benjamin constituted the absolute form out of the empirical fragments themselves.³⁶⁷

Fourthly, given that subsumptive classification involves a structuring of phenomena in line with the conceptual framework of the constitutive subject, the construction of constellations requires that phenomena be *broken up* and *reconfigured* in accordance with their own internal logic. For Benjamin this process of disintegration motivates his interest in the seemingly small details of life, the layout of the 19th Parisian Arcades, for example, which are lost in abstract generalisation of subsumptive thinking. Hence, Benjamin favours, the art of interruption in contrast to the chain of deduction; the tenacity of the essay in contrast to the single gesture of the fragment; the repetition of themes in contrast to shallow universalism; the fullness of concentrated positivity in contrast to the negation of polemic.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ See 3.3 for an example of such reconstruction.

³⁶⁷ Buck-Morss (1978) p. 92.

³⁶⁸ Benjamin (1977) p. 32.

As Rosen comments, it is often those details that are seemingly the most trivial that are often 'closest to the centre'.³⁶⁹ In trying to reconfigure the tacit, mimetic, experiential mode that underlies our knowledge of the world, such minutiae turn out to be fundamentally important.

For Adorno such minutiae are also paramount, this time as a point of resistance against the encroachment of capital:

In the face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself, even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere. If critical theory lingers there, it is not only with a bad conscience.³⁷⁰

That critical theory should have no 'bad conscience' in withdrawing to the individual sphere is echoed in Adorno's skepticism both at the theoretical category of totality and mass political action.³⁷¹ On the former...

Totality is not an affirmative term but rather a critical category. Dialectical critique seeks to salvage and help establish what does not obey totality, what opposes it or what first forms itself as the potential for a not yet existent individuation...A liberated mankind would by no means be a totality³⁷²

Finally, against common notions of abstraction whereby disparate elements are reduced to a common denominator, constellations illuminate phenomena

³⁶⁹ Rosen (1996) p. 239.

³⁷⁰ Adorno (1974) p. 16.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 51-52. 'Even Solidarity, the most honorable mode of conduct of socialism, is sick. ... It was manifested by groups of people who put their lives at stake, counting their own concerns as less important in the face of a tangible possibility...they were ready to sacrifice themselves for each other...In the course of time, however, Solidarity has turned into confidence that the party has a thousand eyes, into enrollment into workers battalions – long since promoted into uniform – as the stronger side, into swimming with the tide of history.'

³⁷² Adorno (1976) p. 12.

through extremes.³⁷³

The Idea is best explained as the representation of the context within which the unique and extreme stands alongside its counterpart³⁷⁴

It is this that seems to initiate Benjamin's interest in baroque tragic drama. The use of allegory, the allusion to a meaning separate to that which is immediately apparent in the drama, is for Benjamin a dialectical movement between extremes.³⁷⁵

It should be now apparent that Benjamin's notion of constellations can be seen to respond to many of Adorno's concerns about *Identity thinking*, providing a 'model' of contemplation which both thinks with concepts and against them. However, there are two important differences between Adorno and Benjamin which emerge at this point. Firstly, Adorno objects to the Platonic timelessness of the ideas.³⁷⁶ In fact, Adorno's use of constellations is very different:

Becoming aware of the constellation in which a thing stands is tantamount to deciphering the constellation which, *having come to be*, it bears within it...The history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in relation to other objects...Cognition of an object in its constellation is cognition of the *process* stored in the object. As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping

³⁷³ At this point it should be clear that the notion of Constellation bears little resemblance to Oakeshott's 'conceptual coherentism' as one commentator alleges (O'Connor (1999) p. 94). What is distinctive about the process of constructing constellations is the extreme juxtaposition of concepts which have been torn from their familiar embeddedness.

³⁷⁴ Benjamin (1977) p. 35.

³⁷⁵ See Jay (1984) p. 246.

³⁷⁶ As we shall see, in the following section, this Platonic timelessness is soon dropped when Benjamin comes into greater contact with Marxism.

that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response not to a single key or a single number but a combination of numbers ³⁷⁷

Rather than delivering eternal truths, Adorno's constellations unseal 'sedimented history' ³⁷⁸ in the object. Given that the mechanism of subsumptive classification necessarily disavows the mediations which make knowing a possibility (see above), Adorno hopes that the construction of constellations can recover or recall such 'sedimented history'. The particularity which can be accessed through the constellation is necessarily time-bound, ³⁷⁹ with constellations themselves shifting historically. Adorno appeals (critically) to Weber's 'The Protestant Ethic and the *Spirit* of Capitalism' for illustration. Weber's concepts are 'gradually composed' from 'individual parts to be taken from historic reality.' Quoting Weber, 'The place of definitive conceptual comprehension cannot, therefore, be at the beginning of the inquiry, only at the end.' ³⁸⁰

Secondly, Adorno completely avoids the use of the term 'idea' altogether. This, I think, is not simply because (as Jameson's suggests) Adorno is uncomfortable with using terms with metaphysical connotations.³⁸¹ Adorno, unlike Benjamin, thinks that constellations point towards phenomena themselves, not merely the relationships between them. Furthermore, Adorno sees 'ideas' as conceptual and thinks that Benjamin is reckless not to recognise them as such.³⁸²

A final point is of importance to both Benjamin and Adorno's notion of the

³⁷⁷ Adorno (1973) p. 163 my emphasis.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Jarvis (1998) p. 176.

³⁸⁰ Adorno (1973) p. 165.

³⁸¹ Jameson (1990) p. 53.

³⁸² Adorno (1973) p. 62.

constellation. Adorno takes the idea of a constellation not as something to be 'applied' to objects but as a form of cognition, immanent to consciousness, not yet subordinated to classificatory thinking. The model for this is language, which, for Adorno, has a 'double character'. On the one hand, as a system of signs it attempts to say what an object comes under or what it is like, as image it holds a mimetic element which attempts to 'be like' the object.³⁸³ Both these goals are equally false is isolation, yet the fact that language cannot be entirely subordinated to one or the other pole is significant for Adorno.

Language offers no mere system of signs for cognitive functions. Where it appears essentially as a language, where it becomes a form of representation, it will not define its concepts. It lends objectivity to them by the relation into which it puts the concepts, centred around a thing. Language thus serves the intention of the concept to express completely what it means.³⁸⁴

The model for thinking in constellations is thus immanent to language itself. This means that constellations do not figure as a portable method to be applied to disparate phenomena but (in Hegelian terms) thinking in constellations is the *determinate negation* of discursive thinking. The negation takes place through the disintegration of abstract categories and the reformulation of their elements. The concept transforms its role from an instrument of knowledge to a mediating element in the transmission of philosophical truth. The negation is immanent, as its appeal to a mimetic element in thinking, which emulates the object as opposed to categorising it, is inseparable from any account of what reason is like (see Chapter Five).

³⁸³ See Adorno (1997) pp. 17-18.

³⁸⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 162.

5.3) The Dialectical Image - Benjamin's Arcades Project

Benjamin's second discussion of the constellation features in his *Arcades Project*. The project gives an account of the rise of capitalist consciousness in the 19th century, as exemplified in Parisian culture.³⁸⁵ Here, he describes the constellation in the following, rather esoteric, terms:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation to what-has-been to the now is dialectical ; it is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. ³⁸⁶

Benjamin has now seemingly abandoned the Platonic timelessness of the 'constellation' described in the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Past and present are now portrayed as being engaged in material conflict. As Max Pensky notes, 'the victors consign all that supports their vision to a harmonious past and all that speaks against it to oblivion.'³⁸⁷ 'History' always excludes those moments which undermine the legitimating story of the dominant class. Benjamin seeks to use the method of constructing constellations to shatter the dominant narrative form of 'the relation to what-has-been to the now', in order that we may re-evaluate the present in new light. Constellations, here, figure as a method through which one can cultivate a particular capacity for recognising such 'subversive recovery' of the past.

³⁸⁵ Whereas London or Manchester were clearly the economic centres of Capitalist development, Benjamin considers Paris to be of more cultural significance.

³⁸⁶ Benjamin, W. (1999) *The Arcades Project* translated by H. Eiland and K. Mclaughlin (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA) p. 462; N2a, 3.

³⁸⁷ Pensky, M. (2004) *Method and Time; Benjamin's's Dialectical Images in The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (CUP, Cambridge) p. 180.

Benjamin's focus, in this respect, is the appearance of the commodity form in 19th century consciousness. Before examining how this fits with the notion of constellation, it is important to be clear as to how Benjamin understands the commodity form. In a revealing passage from an earlier draft to *The Arcades Project*, he claims,

Corresponding in the collective consciousness to the forms of the new means of production, which at first were still dominated by the old (Marx), are images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wishful fantasises, and in them the collective seeks both to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies in the social system of production. In addition, these wish-fulfilling images manifest an emphatic striving for the outmoded, which means, however, with the most recent past.³⁸⁸

Key differences, thus, emerge between Benjamin's understanding of the commodity form and that of Marx (and Adorno). For Marx, the commodity form entails a continuance of pre-modern religious consciousness in that inanimate objects (for example, mobile phones, cars, labelled clothing) are invested with subjective properties. Conversely, the producer of the commodity is objectified. Benjamin, however, wants to make the further claim that commodities are 'wish-images' of the 'collective unconscious', eluding towards some form of unfulfilled utopian expectation. Adorno's response is twofold. Firstly, he worries that the notion of a 'collective unconscious' is a reactionary Jungian idea.³⁸⁹ Attempting to appeal to Benjamin's Marxist sensibilities he claims that Jung 'serves to erase the difference between classes'.³⁹⁰ Such traces were to disappear from Benjamin's later works. Secondly, Adorno complains that Benjamin's

³⁸⁸ Benjamin (1986) p. 148.

³⁸⁹ Benjamin, W. And Adorno T. (1999) *The Complete Correspondence* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA) p. 107.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

understanding of the commodity as 'wish-image' is hopelessly subjectivist: 'The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; it is rather dialectical in character, in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness.'³⁹¹

Benjamin's understanding of the appearance of the commodity form tends to view it as some sort of collective delusion rather than a phenomena produced through the objective mechanisms of capitalist exchange.

However, in spite of such theoretical weakness, Benjamin and Adorno are in agreement over the constant striving for 'newness' in capitalist culture³⁹² which treats discarded fads or trends 'as having been destroyed by a series of catastrophes'. Benjamin wants to use the constellation (or dialectical image) to break this momentum in 'showing' the utopian expectation invested in the commodity to be a continually unfulfilled cycle of repetition. Benjamin, with typical theological bombast, claims that in so far as the commodity is purely cipher of exchange value, it is an expression of 'Hell'.³⁹³ To illuminate the meaningless, hellishness of capitalist culture, Benjamin's work highlights those fashions, architectural styles, popular novels etc for which the status of phantasmagoria has faded. Hence, he can reveal the promise of the commodity to always be illusory and transient.

To achieve this undertaking, Benjamin avoids typical Marxist method and instead moves towards Breton and Surrealism. This is because, like Adorno, Benjamin is interested in the question of how one can be receptive to the subversion of fetishism, given that (wholly) discursive reason inscribes into itself fetishist rigidity. Surrealist montage offers a powerful tool to shock by

³⁹¹ Adorno and Benjamin (1999) p. 105.

³⁹² Ibid. pp. 94-106.

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 184.

presenting found objects in unfamiliar contexts. In doing so it highlights the meaningless of signification. As Pensky claims:

Surrealist montage means in the sense that it reveals something about the arbitrary nature of signification, this arbitrary character is the object of aesthetic experience itself.³⁹⁴

Benjamin thus 'removes' discarded cultural artefacts from their original context and elicits a new necessary interpretation of the fragments relationships with each other. This involves a new re-interpretation of the culture from which they were wrested and the relationship of that culture to the present moment'.³⁹⁵

Benjamin's approach causes Adorno much concern in this respect. His 'ascetic refusal of interpretation',³⁹⁶ the assumption that historical material in a particular configuration will speak for itself, is, for Adorno, the source of many of his shortcomings. In a letter to Benjamin, of 10th November 1938, Adorno informs Benjamin, '[Y]our dialectic is lacking in one thing: mediation.'³⁹⁷ Furthermore, '[t]he mediation which I miss and find obscured by materialist historiographical evocation, is simply the theory which your study has omitted.'³⁹⁸

The question arises as to what Adorno legitimately expects of Benjamin, given his own sympathy towards the method of constructing constellations. Firstly, repeating an earlier claim, Adorno thinks that Benjamin lacks an account of the objective production of Phantasmagoria through particular social relations.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ Pensky (2004) p. 183.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.,

³⁹⁶ Adorno and Benjamin (1999) p. 282.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.,

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 283.

³⁹⁹ Adorno, worried that Benjamin deals only with the appearance of Phantasmagoria, asks him to drop the term 'dialectical image' and replace it with his earlier term 'models' to incorporate an account of the generation of Phantasmagoria. (Adorno and Benjamin (1999), p. 281)

Benjamin engages with Phantasmagoria as some sort of deluded 'vision'⁴⁰⁰ and lacks a proper theoretical account of their 'mediation through the entire social system'.⁴⁰¹ Secondly, when Benjamin does invoke some sort of materialist framework it is often crude and reductionist. Adorno cites Benjamin's positivist interpretation of Baudelaire's 'L'Ame du Vin'⁴⁰² in terms of an increase in wine duty as exemplary in this respect. Thirdly, Benjamin often moves in exactly the opposite direction in moving towards positive theology. Hence, Benjamin is at the 'crossroads between magic and positivism'.⁴⁰³

5.4) Mediation

An interesting question, however, arises as to Adorno's repeated use of the word 'mediation'. Michael Rosen, in *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism*, claims that Adorno's use of Hegelian language in this respect is illegitimate, given Adorno's rejection of the metaphysical context within which such language obtains its meaning. The ontological mediations that make up Hegel's system can be considered valid only from the perspective of Hegel's *Absolute*, a perspective Adorno rejects (see Chapter One, section 3.4). In response to Rosen, it would appear that Adorno uses mediation to mean a number of different things, each of which can be seen to differ markedly from its Hegelian usage.

Firstly, 'mediation' can be used pejoratively⁴⁰⁴ to refer to the bad *Absolute*. The truth content of Hegel's system is the mediation of all human beings and the products of their labour through exchange (see Chapter Three). Secondly,

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 281.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 284.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 283.

⁴⁰³ Adorno and Benjamin (1999) p. 284.

⁴⁰⁴ For example Adorno (1993) p. 25.

mediation refers to 'conceptual mediation' in the specific form of the constellation. This seems to be closest to one use of the term mediation in Hegel.

In the Encyclopedia logic, Hegel claims:

...[I]t is quite mindless not to see that the unity of *distinct* determinations is not just a purely immediate...unity but that what is posited in it is precisely that one of the determinations has truth only through its mediation by the other; or, in other words, that each of them is mediated with the truth only through the other.⁴⁰⁵

Truth comes from overcoming the one-sided, incompleteness of concepts and placing them with the mediated totality. From the previous discussion, however, it should be clear that Hegel's understanding of 'conceptual mediation' and Adorno's use of the notion of a 'constellation' are markedly different. We can summarise the main differences, so far, as follows. Firstly, Hegel deals only with the *categories* of particular and universal, so mediation can never extend to unveiling the particular itself. Secondly, mediation in Hegel rests upon a teleological development towards reconciliation whereas, in Adorno, no such path is guaranteed. Thirdly, mediation in Hegel tends towards the resolution of antagonisms in the *Absolute*, whereas, in Adorno contradiction is held open. It is only through its extremes that the constellation points towards the object. Fourthly, the constellation only alludes to a yet unattainable good, whereas Hegel presents us with a discursive account of the rational in a world which has (largely) attained actuality.

There is a third sense in which Adorno uses the terms 'mediation', in the sense of an 'affinity' between subject and object. Adorno's account of such an 'affinity' is underpinned by an account of reason's mediation of both mimetic and discursive moments, which I discuss in chapter six.

⁴⁰⁵ Hegel (1991) pp. 117-8.

6) Conclusion - Constellations and Reification

How does Adorno's use of Benjamin connect with the problems of social constitution and alienation with which we began? In short, we can see both the constellation and the dialectical image as responses to identity thinking, as attempts to reveal the sedimented history in seemingly immutable and fixed categories. Firstly, whereas the relationship of exchange abstractly identifies non-identical commodities through the medium of money, the process of constructing constellations pinpoints the 'concrete, qualitative difference between apparently similar phenomena'.⁴⁰⁶ Buck-Morss provides two interesting examples of this practice. Firstly, Adorno can identify qualities positively within certain constellational configurations and negatively in others. So, for example, childlike qualities in the music of Debussy, Stravinsky and Ravel have different significances within different musical constellations.⁴⁰⁷ Secondly, Adorno frequently uses terms within constellations such that they take upon a different significance. Hence the nature in 'natural-history' is not really natural (in a reductionist sense) nor the history really historical (see final chapter). It is not the concept itself which confers meaning but its connections with other concepts in a particular context.

Secondly, whereas *identity thinking* conceals the antagonisms of bourgeois society through claiming to have reconciled concept and object in the apparatus of the constitutive subject, the process of constructing constellations highlights contradiction. As Buck-Morss comments, this process largely means revealing what appears as one thing to be its opposite through the juxtaposition of

⁴⁰⁶ Buck-Morss (1978) p. 98.

⁴⁰⁷ Adorno (1964) p. 70.

extremes.⁴⁰⁸ The individualism of Jazz, for example, is really stereotypical, its improvisation really standardised, its eroticism really repressive, its democratic bent really totalitarian.⁴⁰⁹ What is seemingly unconnected is shown to be dialectically related.

Thirdly, whereas the exchange society disconnects the object from its process of production (reification), the construction of a constellation brings back the historical against the mythic cycle of repetition. I have already given the example of Benjamin's use of constellations in *The Arcades Project* to deconstruct the 'eternal newness' of commodity production. Likewise, Adorno uses the constellation to illuminate 'sedimented history' in the object.

Finally, it must be remembered that the constellation is only a means of *contemplating* the absent good. The constellation is, therefore, merely a means to break down fetishised conceptions of the world. In this sense, I find it wanting, for the reasons I outlined in the previous chapter. Determinate negation, whilst it should not follow the rigidly teleological path it does in Hegel, should deliver more than merely a means of contemplative social criticism. Class struggle should be understood as a process in which human potentialities and spontaneities are unleashed. It should carry a utopian moment. Whilst the resources for such an understanding are certainly present in Adorno's thinking, I think they are very much compromised by the strength of his philosophical negativism.

⁴⁰⁸ Buck-Morss (1978) p. 100.

⁴⁰⁹ Adorno (1964) p. 85-105.

5) Reconciliation and Autonomy in Adorno

1) Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined various ways in which Adorno thinks both with and against Hegel in developing a critique of 'identity thinking'. I now want to build upon two related elements of this critique, which I feel contribute strongly towards understanding the problem of social constitution. Firstly, I want to develop Adorno's claim that societal rationalisation involves a disavowal of the very mediations which make knowing a possibility. These, specifically, are responses to objects that are rooted in our animality (e.g. sense, impulse and desire). I will later argue that Adorno's understanding of this process of disavowal and abstraction has much in common with Hegel's critique of the enlightenment (specifically) and his notions of alienation and inversion (more generally). Secondly, I want to develop Adorno's notion of '*Solidarity*', the key ethical category of his thinking, as a powerful statement of the idea of social autonomy. '*Solidarity*' is located in our bodily capacity for empathy with the suffering and vulnerability of others and, as such, demands the formation of social relations in which human beings are no longer treated as fungible commodities. The common thread throughout this chapter is Adorno's understanding of the relationship between sense and reason (or nature and culture) and his affirmation of materialism contra Hegel (explicitly) and (by extension) Habermas, Wellmer and Honneth. Adorno's treatment of this philosophical dualism not only directly informs his materialist notion of social

constitution but is also the key to understanding his ethics, specifically the idea of social autonomy.

Firstly, by way of introduction, I want to situate Adorno against both Kant and Habermas, on the one hand, for whom the sensible is relegated to the domain of causality and excluded from the realm of reason, and against Nietzsche, on the other hand, for whom the sensible/aesthetic orientation is to be promoted to counter the claims of abstract reason. Following on from this, I introduce the idea of a 'natural history' in Adorno as a means to undermine such an opposition of sense and reason or (more broadly) nature and culture. In so doing, I also distinguish Adorno's position on the relationship of nature and culture from that of Hegel. Secondly, I examine Adorno's semi-historical account of the unfolding of the domination of sensuous nature and its relationship to social domination through examining the excursions on Homer's *Odyssey* and De Sade's 'Juliette' in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Thirdly, I look more closely at Adorno's understanding of the relationship between the sensible or somatic and the rational through an account of his notion of mimesis. I draw on Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'mimetic faculty' in developing this account. For both Adorno and Benjamin, the modern world can be seen to profoundly damage our capacity to integrate experience and our ability to respond ethically to one another. Finally, and against this background, I turn to a discussion of Adorno's notions of *Solidarity* and social autonomy. Returning to the theme of the opening section, I will argue that Adorno retains both the ethical demands of Kantian moral autonomy (not liquidating the notion of freedom into the empirical or political contra Hegel) whilst simultaneously pursuing a Nietzschean critique of the effect that thinking about autonomy in this way has upon individuals.

2) Natural-History

Undermining the philosophical dualism of sense and reason is essential to Adorno's philosophical project. Adorno can no more side with Kant on this question than with Nietzsche, both of whom insist upon a duality of sense and reason and yet come down on different sides.⁴¹⁰ For Kant, sensibility belongs to the causal order of things, a system of lawful regularities, whereas reason is ethical and hence a space of freedom. Nietzsche agrees that modern reason excludes sensibility but takes this to have fundamentally damaging implications for individuals, decapitating any motivational basis for action. Instead, Nietzsche promotes an aesthetic world-orientation which affirms the values of the intuitive, active, self-creative individual. For Adorno, both accounts fail to grasp the interdependence of reason and sensibility and fail to understand the latter as a condition of possibility of the former,⁴¹¹ albeit one which is disavowed in the formation of enlightened reason.

Underlying this notion of interdependence is the idea of 'natural-history', which Adorno develops in his Hegel excursus in *Negative Dialectics*. Here, the Kantian dualism of sense and reason is more broadly addressed in terms of a duality of nature (human animality) and history (humans as free, self-conscious beings). Adorno claims:

The traditional antithesis of nature and history is both true and false; true in so far as it expresses what the moment of nature underwent; false in so far as it apologetically recapitulates, by conceptual reconstruction, history's concealment of its natural outgrowth.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ See Bernstein, J. 'The Dead Speaking of Stars and Stones' in Rush (ed.) (2004) p. 139-142

⁴¹¹ I develop this claim more closely in the section on mimesis.

⁴¹² Adorno (1973) p. 358.

Adorno takes the antithesis to be false because he adopts a somewhat (albeit non-reductionist) naturalist position, conceiving of human life and culture as emerging within and from nature. We must always conceive of ourselves as part of the natural world. Conversely, what appear to us as purely natural phenomena must be seen as subject to historical change, climate change, the extinction of species or the development of new diseases etc.⁴¹³ Adorno frequently identifies his position as solidly 'materialist'⁴¹⁴ whilst wanting to avoid the mechanistic, determinist connotations such a terms frequently carries. This insistence upon an open-ended dialectic of what we take to be 'natural' and what we take to be 'social' goes some way towards addressing Adorno's understanding of what a non mechanistic 'materialism' might look like. Furthermore, this understanding of materialism makes Adorno's notion of social constitution very much distinctive in that Adorno clearly wants to distinguish his position from any form of cultural idealism (see Section 4).

Adorno takes the antithesis between nature and culture to be true in that the philosophical separation of culture and nature expresses the extent of rationalised socialisation. The condition it expresses is one in which, as Adorno puts it in '*Minima Moralia*', 'our perspective of life has passed into an Ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer'.⁴¹⁵ The entire nexus of modern social relations has become a dead, closed causal order. We are left with a life that does

⁴¹³ See Bernstein (1999) pp188,199

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, Jarvis, Simon (2004) *Adorno, Marx, Materialism in The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge) whom also examines this claim at great length in Jarvis, Simon (1998) *Adorno- A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Polity).

⁴¹⁵ Adorno (1974) p. 15.

not live, a life composed entirely of a meaningless cycle of production and consumption to no apparent greater purpose.

Adorno's dialectic of nature and history, therefore, expresses not only a differentiated unity of nature and history but also plays upon tensions in our understanding of each term. Nature, firstly, pejoratively expresses a closed, causal, mechanistic system outside the ethical realm of human freedom. However, secondly, nature is taken in a more positive, almost romantic sense to refer to spontaneity, passion and aesthetic sensibility. History, likewise, both positively denotes the collective, self-conscious shaping of the future, the realm of freedom as opposed to the realm of necessity, and to a series of seemingly inexorable laws, against which we feel powerless. Adorno, here, follows Marx's lead in identifying the naturalistic appearance of the laws of capitalism:

Much as this motion appears as a social process, much as the single moments of this motion take their departure from the conscious will and from particular purposes of individuals, the totality of the process does appear as an objective context arising by natural growth. It is indeed due to the interaction of conscious individuals, but neither seated in their consciousness nor subsumed under them as a whole. ⁴¹⁶

Furthermore, for Adorno, it is the very disavowal of sensuous nature (in the positive sense) in the process of societal rationalisation which leads to social processes assuming naturalistic properties (in the negative sense).

The more relentlessly socialisation commands all moments of human and inhuman immediacy, the smaller the capacity of men to recall that this web has evolved, and the more irresistible its natural appearance. The appearance is reinforced as the distance between human history and nature keeps growing: nature turns into an irresistible parable of imprisonment. ⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Marx (1953) p. 111.

⁴¹⁷ Adorno (1973) p. 358.

The notion of 'natural-history' not only pits Adorno against Kant and Nietzsche but also against Hegel. For Hegel, nature is ultimately reducible to *Spirit*, whereas for Adorno it is a differentiated substratum (see Chapter Three, section three). Furthermore, whereas for Hegel all of reality is ultimately knowable in terms of the rational concept, for Adorno, as I have argued, conceptual knowledge is limited in terms of its ability to grasp the particular.

3) From the Odyssey to Juliette

Adorno and Horkheimer famously document the historical emergence of societal rationalisation and its impact upon sensuous nature in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This process, although accelerated and intensified in the development of modern capitalism, has its roots in human pre-history. In declaring 'myth' as 'already enlightenment'⁴¹⁸ they understand seemingly irrational belief systems as attempts to explain and thus control the unknown (see below). Attempts to control and manipulate external nature are always bound up with both internal repression and societal domination. The two excursions in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, firstly 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment' and, secondly, 'Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality', evidence a significant historical *shift* in the form of such domination. Although Adorno and Horkheimer consider Odysseus to be a proto-typical bourgeois subject, repressing his own drives and instincts (and even his own identity) in order to overcome the many obstacles he is confronted with, Odysseus only goes as far as is necessary to maintain his material existence. Self-mastery is not an end in itself. Furthermore, Odysseus's desire to return home and be reunited with Penelope holds out the final promise of reconciliation. Juliette, on the other hand, represents a world with no substantive goals, governed by random and

⁴¹⁸ Adorno (1997) p. xvi.

impersonal mechanisms whose only rationale is efficiency and organisational power. Both societal and internal domination, though such mechanisms, have become an overriding imperative.⁴¹⁹ Drawing upon a constellation of literary and philosophical motifs from Kant's transcendental subject to de Sade's orgies, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the culmination of Enlightenment's dark side:

Reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral in regards to its ends; its element is coordination. What Kant grounded transcendently, the affinity of Knowledge and planning, which impressed the stamp of inescapable expediency on every aspect of a bourgeois existence that was wholly rationalised, even in every breathing space, Sade realised empirically more than a century before sport was conceived. The teams of modern sport, whose interaction is so precisely regulated that no member has any doubt about his role, and which provide a reserve for every player, have their exact counterpart in the teams of Juliette, which employ every moment usefully, neglect no human orifice and carry out every function. Intensive, purposeful activity prevails in *Spirit* as in all branches of mass culture, while the inadequately initiated spectator cannot divine the difference in the combinations, or the meaning of variations by the arbitrarily determined rule. The architectonic structure of the Kantian system, like the gymnastic pyramids of Sade's orgies and the schematicised principles of the early bourgeois freemasonry, which has its cyclical mirror-image in the strict regimentation of the libertine society of the 120 Journées, reveals *an organisation of life as a whole which is deprived of any substantial goal.*⁴²⁰

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⁴²⁰ Adorno (1997) p. 88 my emphasis. I think that the shift between the *Odyssey* and Juliette demonstrates that Adorno's critique is not primarily directed at instrumental reason per se but at the availability of unconditional ethical ends. In this way, I think he can absorb Christine Korsgaard's claim that instrumental reason is a 'constitutive norm of willing' (see Korsgaard, Christine (1997) 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason' in *Ethics and Practical Reason* Eds. G. Cully and B. Gaut (Oxford: Clarendon Press)). In willing an end, one is prescribing a law for oneself. My causality is already thought in the very act of willing an end. It is not the case that to will an end is to allow some impulse or desire to operate in me but to "consciously pick up the reins and make myself the cause of an end" (Korsgaard, 1997 p247). For Korsgaard, however,

To understand the emergence of such conditions, as described in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we have to return to Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of the Odyssey, as a nascent stage of Enlightenment. As I have claimed, Odysseus, for Adorno, is the prototypical bourgeois subject right down to his predisposal towards DIY.⁴²¹ Each encounter he has is a potential threat to his autonomy and each time he allows instinct or desire to rule his behaviour he is faced with annihilation. His only option is to pursue a strategy of self-mastery through which he can manage each situation:

The nimble witted survives only at the price of his own dream, which he wins only by demystifying himself as well as the powers without. He can never have everything; he always has to wait, to be patient, to do without; he may not taste the lotus or eat the cattle of the sun God Hyperion, and when he steers between the rocks he must count on the loss of the men whom Scylla plucks from the boat. He just pulls through; struggle is his survival; and all the fame that he and the others win in the process serves only to confirm that the title of the hero is only gained at the price of the abasement and mortification of the instinct for complete, universal and undivided happiness.⁴²²

Key to Odysseus' success is the rational calculation of sacrifice. Sacrifice, for Adorno, constitutes a primitive form of exchange whereby the external powers are seen to be controlled or appeased at the expense of ones own renunciation, 'barter is the secular form of sacrifice...a device of men by which the Gods may be mastered'.⁴²³ Odysseus' ability to utilise this form of rational exchange

instrumental action must be motivated by unconditional ethical ends and it is the unavailability of such ends within the 'Iron Cage' that is Adorno's prime concern.

⁴²¹ Ibid., pp.74-5.

⁴²² Ibid., p. 57.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 49.

overthrows the Gods 'by the very system by which they are honoured'.⁴²⁴ By establishing how many men he can afford to lose or how much he can postpone instant gratification, Odysseus can get one up on the Gods.

However, Odysseus' cunning is always self-undermining. For example, when he meets the Cyclops Polyphemus he tells him that his name is 'no-man'. Offered wine and then blinded by Odysseus, the Cyclops cries out that 'no-man' injured him. As no one is responsible Odysseus escapes unharmed. However, his self-assertion is secured at the cost of the renunciation of his own identity.

The subject denies his own identity which makes him a subject, and keeps himself alive by imitating the amorphous.⁴²⁵

No episode better illustrates the relationship between renunciation and domination as Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens:

There is no homecoming for the man who draws near them unawares and hears the Sirens voices; no welcome from his wife, no little children brightening at their fathers return. For their high clear song the Sirens bewitch him, as they sit there in a meadow piled high with the mouldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones.⁴²⁶

Warned of the sea creatures that lure sailors to their doom by the Goddess Circe, Odysseus instructs his crew to put beeswax in their ears so as to be immune from their spell.

The labourers must be fresh and concentrate as they look ahead, and must ignore whatever lies to one side.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Ibid.,

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴²⁶ Homer (1986) *The Odyssey* (Oxford, OUP) p. 147.

⁴²⁷ Adorno (1997) p. 34.

Odysseus himself asks to be bound to the ship's mast. He listens but cannot act on his temptation. The more he begs to be freed; the tighter he is to be bound.

The prisoner is present at a concert, an inactive eavesdropper like later concertgoers, and his *Spirited* call for liberation fades like applause.⁴²⁸

What is most interesting about the example is that it draws together three forms of domination above, domination over external nature (or external threats), domination over ones own instincts and domination over other men and women, in one single schema. By binding himself, Odysseus attempts to remain free from the Siren's allure yet party to their music. His cunning, however, does not bring fulfilment as he is reduced to a mere passive consumer of the sirens song. On the other side of the class divide, Odysseus's 'men know only of the songs danger and nothing of its beauty, and leave him at the mast in order to save him and themselves. They reproduce the oppressors' life together with their own, and the oppressor is no longer able to escape his social role.'⁴²⁹

4) Natural and Social Domination

What we find in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a strong conflation between the domination of nature and social domination. This (initially) appears problematic from the perspective of social constitution, as we tend to think of imposition upon the natural world in very different terms to that of the domination of other human beings. The former has the structure of subject-object domination whereas the latter has the structure of subject-subject domination. This conflation is the source of much criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer's position, particularly from Axel Honneth. However, as I will argue, such

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.,

criticism often fails to understand Adorno's dialectical construction of natural-history and tends to fall back upon the very reified distinctions that Adorno wants to move beyond.

Honneth's concern is that Adorno interprets the formation of an individual's ego identity purely in terms of the relationship between the individual subject and her natural environment. Like Habermas and Wellmer, Honneth claims that Adorno can only offer an 'aesthetic' model of ego identity that is formed independently of 'social recognition by other subjects'. What Adorno is seen to ignore is the intra-psychic processes that govern ego formation, the socialising process in which subjects' 'motive energies' are shaped by the demands of labour and the process through which instincts superfluous to such demands are sublimated and suppressed. In other words, there is a qualitative difference between the formation of the ego in relation to nature and in relation to society.

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Adorno, Honneth claims, seems to be suggesting that the social domination of one class over another is a kind of 'intra-social extension of the human domination of external nature.' He is, Honneth claims, crudely inserting a notion of social domination into his theory 'modelled upon' their prime concern, the domination of both internal and external nature:

Adorno and Horkheimer are so strongly fixated on the model of the instrumental control of nature, which is the real interest of their philosophy of history, that they also want to conceive the manner of functioning of intra-social domination according to this model.⁴³¹

This, for Honneth, means that Adorno must conceive of a suppressed class as *'an unresisting object of the mechanisms of technical control in the same way as*

⁴³⁰ Honneth, A. (1991) *The Critique of Power* (MIT, Cambridge) p. 43.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

nature.' Honneth sees Adorno as making the claim that domination can only be exercised in a one way fashion, either through direct force or through persuasion, manipulation and deception, 'It seems as if the procedures of control shape individuals without running into attempts at social resistance and cultural opposition'.⁴³² Adorno is unable to comprehend social forms of resistance that do not have an analogue in 'nature' nor can he comprehend any kind of consensually secured social domination. Relations of domination, for Honneth, can only be explained by reference to the *intersubjective recognition* of such social structures forged in relation to a particular, culturally established, ethical framework. They cannot be conceived as being analogous to subject-object (or man and nature) relations, hence, the instigation of the communicative turn.

Simon Jarvis' 'Adorno, A Critical Introduction', makes a number of criticisms of Honneth's position. In relation to the broader dispute between first and second generation critical theorists, Jarvis sees the difference as follows. Honneth wants to ground a model of social conflict in a theory of communication, 'the theory of communication is the grounding element, the model of social conflict is what is grounded'.⁴³³ Adorno, conversely, develops a theory of the *entanglement* of communication and domination, which cannot itself be grounded in a theory of communication. Thus, Adorno cannot accept a separation (even for analytical or procedural purposes) between communication and social conflict. This argument mirrors the claims made against Habermas in the previous chapter.

On the question of whether Adorno sees social domination as analogous to the domination of nature, Jarvis' answer is similar. Adorno wants to challenge 'cultural idealism', the idea that there is a 'pure' realm of culture or society and

⁴³² Ibid., p. 52.

⁴³³ Jarvis (1998) p. 36.

a 'pure' realm of nature. Human beings are seen as being (at least) part nature so that domination over other human beings is already domination over nature. As he remarks

Only a theory which itself presupposes mastery of nature can regard intersubjectivity as a separate sphere which has somehow separated itself from the natural.⁴³⁴

Again, a fixed separation between nature and culture (even procedural) is taken by Adorno to presuppose the domination of nature.

Whilst I think Jarvis is right about the very different assumptions underlying first and second generation critical theory, Honneth raises an interesting set of issues in arguing that Adorno, if he wants to make an analogy between social domination and the domination of nature, must see those subjected to social domination as an 'unresisting object'. Of course, it is precisely this passive concept of nature that Adorno wants to challenge (see above). This challenge can be seen to stem back to the late Kant. Kant, in the Third Critique, attributes to nature an ideal purposiveness, 'a purposiveness without purpose'. Natural beauty, for Kant, is attributed to the capacity of nature to 'form itself, in its freedom, also in an aesthetically purposive way, according to chemical laws.'⁴³⁵ In contradistinction to the first and second critiques, nature does not now figure as something to be 'mastered' but as a subject, without teleology, plan or intention.

Herbert Marcuse can be seen to develop such a notion, seeing nature as 'an ally in the struggle against the exploitative societies in which the violation of nature aggravates the violation of man'.⁴³⁶ Nature is seen not as an object but as a 'subject in its own right'. Like Adorno, Marcuse identifies a radical change in

⁴³⁴ Ibid p. 35.

⁴³⁵ Kant (1987) § 58

the nature of experience itself as being necessary for human emancipation. Also, like Adorno, Marcuse considers the Kantian separation of concept and intuition and the subsequent prioritising of the former over the latter as encompassing a fundamentally emaciated structure of human experience. Marcuse's notion of 'radical sensibility...stresses the active, constitutive role of the senses in shaping reason'.⁴³⁷ In other words, the 'senses' become the 'source' of a new socialist rationality. Given this transformation, 'Nature will have lost its mere utility, it would not appear merely as stuff, organic or inorganic matter, but as life force in its own right, as subject-object; the striving for life is the substance common to man and nature.'⁴³⁸

It must be emphasised that Marcuse's account is non-teleological; that nature only becomes congenial for human emancipation to the extent that 'nature's own gratifying forces and qualities are recovered and released'.⁴³⁹ Those elements of nature which have been damaged through rationalisation must be redeemed in order to achieve liberation. There is no intention in nature itself. However, Marcuse's conception of nature differs significantly from Honneth's implication that nature must be an 'unresisting object'. To 'violate nature' is to 'violate' certain innate qualities which are essential to the fulfilment of life.

5) The Mimetic Faculty

Adorno does not share Marcuse's sensuous utopianism in many ways. Adorno is keen to challenge many romantic notions of nature, instead arguing that much

⁴³⁶ Marcuse, H. *Nature and Revolution* in (2000) Cazeaux, C. (ed.) *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (Routledge, London).

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

of what we falsely see as free and spontaneous in nature is actually a function of self-preservation. Birdsong, for example, is not 'song' but bound up with the self-preservation of the species. However, Adorno can still be seen to pursue this notion of nature as a source of potentiality and promise, particularly in the idea of mimesis. Understanding the notion of mimesis is essential in developing the critique of identity thinking that I began to outline in the previous chapter. Understanding the mimetic response and its disavowal in and through identity thinking is key to understanding the seemingly closed and reified nature of the iron cage.

Adorno's account of mimesis can only really be understood as a development of the notion of the mimetic faculty found in the work of Walter Benjamin. It is here where we can see the roots of some of Adorno's concerns about the emaciated nature of modern experience. Before analysing the role mimesis plays in Adorno's philosophy, I will first give a brief account of its roots in Benjamin.

As Michael Rosen argues, Benjamin's concern with the mimetic faculty can be seen as arising from his Kantian concern with the nature of experience, albeit a concern with a far broader notion of experience than the cataloguing of sense images under formal rules.⁴⁴⁰ Benjamin's key concern is the flattening of experience in modernity. Individuals in the modern world suffer from both a loss of emotional richness and a reduced capacity to *integrate* experience. Against this rationalist, scientific notion of experience, which has come to historical prominence, Benjamin appeals to a mode of experience that is based upon the ability to form non-sensible resemblances. This he describes as the Mimetic faculty:

⁴⁴⁰ Rosen (2004) p. 44.

The highest capacity for producing similarities...is mans. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to behave and become like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.⁴⁴¹

Benjamin, here, is interested, firstly, in a form of response to otherness which attempts to assimilate the self to the other and, secondly, a *capacity for perceiving* resemblances. Such a capacity arises in ritual, astrology and divination but does not fade with the collapse of such activities. Instead, for Benjamin, it 'migrates' into language: 'It is to language that clairvoyance has, over the course of history, yielded its old powers.'⁴⁴²

In terms of our everyday experience, mimesis refers to the identification of correspondences transmitted by society's members at the deepest level of their consciousness, without them being rationally aware of making such connections.⁴⁴³ Benjamin sets himself the task of reawakening or uncovering such a form of experience. However, as he claims in his essay, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire',⁴⁴⁴ our capacity for experience has been damaged through the onset of industrial capitalism. Appealing to Proust's *memoire involontaire* Benjamin sees the increasing atrophy of experience in terms of the loss of richness and pleasure gained from direct and involuntary experience of an object, which is quickly covered over by the voluntary memory in the service of the intellect. This *memoire involontaire* arises, for Proust, 'somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the

⁴⁴¹ Benjamin (1979) p. 333.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 68.

⁴⁴³ Rosen (2004) p. 46.

⁴⁴⁴ Benjamin (1999) pp. 152-97.

sensation which such an object arouses in us), though we have no idea which one it is. As for that object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it.’⁴⁴⁵

For Benjamin, however, this is not a matter of chance but historically tied up with the onset of modern capitalism. The overwhelming, sensational shock character of modern life causes a ‘retreat of inner life so that it can only be disclosed as *memoire involontaire*.⁴⁴⁶ The involuntary aspects of memory cannot support and enrich the voluntary as they are buried deep within the mind in response to the tumultuous character of modern life. Experience takes the form of *erlebnis* (immediate and fleeting) rather than *erfahrung* (rich and continuous).

In Benjamin, therefore, we can see the development of a critique of rationalism, whereby rationalism is defined solely in terms of an increase of the discretionary powers of the individual. In its place, he appeals to a receptive abandonment to impulse and desire and to a shared, tacit form of mimetic experience. Such an appeal, however, does not take our understanding of desire and spontaneity from within industrial capitalism as paradigmatic. The domination of voluntary memory as a self-defence mechanism against the threatening nature of modern capitalism results in involuntary memory being disclosed in an often violent and exceptional manner, in Baudelaire’s response to the crowd, for example. Benjamin’s appeal to spontaneity and mimesis presupposes a transformation of our social relations and our relationship with nature such that such a defence mechanism is less necessary. I shall now develop these themes further through Adorno.

⁴⁴⁵ Quoted in Benjamin (1999) p. 155.

⁴⁴⁶ Rosen (1996) p. 244.

Adorno retains Benjamin's understanding of mimesis as a type of response to an object in which the subject attempts to assimilate itself to the object by mimicry and, more broadly, as a type of experience which is capable of drawing similarities and connections in forms which are non-conceptual or non-discursive. Adorno's anthropology is highly dubious but his notion of mimesis philosophically suggestive.

The mimetic response, for Adorno, originates from a primeval fear of nature, in a world governed by the principle of *mana*. For Adorno, approaching objects as seats of *mana* is a consequence of the weakness of human beings in the face of nature. From this point, the distinction of subject and object and the development of language arises:

The separation of the animate and the inanimate, the occupation of certain places by demons and deities, first arises from...pre-animism, which contains the first lines of the separation of subject and object. When the tree is no longer approached merely as tree, but as evidence for an Other, as the location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that something is itself and at one and the same time something other than itself, identical and not identical.⁴⁴⁷

The mimetic response, thus, is occasioned by fear of unknown nature and gives rise to the attribution of supernatural properties to the object. The status of this response is highly complex. Firstly, mimesis originates as a distancing mechanism in response to feared nature, an attempt to, firstly, appease and, secondly, control the unknown through imitation. Primitive magic frequently involves a complex set of rituals involving the imitation of natural forces. The same urge behind this primal mode of controlling nature gives rise to the conceptual mapping of the external world. The naming of animistic deities and, eventually, the use of grand mythological stories to explain and, thus, control the

⁴⁴⁷ Adorno (1997) p. 15.

unknown are all rooted in a negative flight of fear. Secondly, however, the mimetic response to an object stands more closely to the object which generates it than conceptual identification. As I argued in the previous chapter, conceptual identification involves three features, the explanation of every event as repetition, the separation of knowing subject from object and the principle of instrumentality. The particular is made fixed and immutable by subsumption within the universal. The mimetic response, in contradistinction, more intimately captures the object that occasions it. I shall develop this claim later. Thirdly, both forms of response can be seen to be complexly interrelated in the example Adorno provides above. The tree is both identified, under the concept 'tree', whilst attributed with a non-identical excess, it is not merely a 'tree' but a location of mana. This latter idea of an anthropomorphic projection of ends and 'life' upon objects in the external world fits well with the notion of 'discerning similarities' involved in Benjamin's notion of mimesis. The world is invested with meaning though a shared, felt and tacit network of associations.⁴⁴⁸

Mimesis, therefore, is a primal mode of attempting to appease feared nature through imitating it, to be like the object rather than classifying it or saying what it is like. As I have said, this response is gradually *supplanted* by the manipulative intervention into natural processes (whereby subsumptive classification becomes the mode of thinking most appropriate). It is not, however, *extinguished*.

⁴⁴⁸ This sense of investing others and the natural world with a sense of being ends in themselves (as opposed to being objects to manipulate) is something Adorno wants to recapture – in a non-mythological form. See below.

The ratio which supplants mimesis is not simply its counterpart. It is itself mimesis, mimesis unto death.⁴⁴⁹

We can understand this claim in two ways. Firstly, Adorno could be making the hyperbolic claim that the development of the iron cage (the nexus of cold, calculating, instrumental social relations and institutional structures) is a mimetic response to ward off what human beings fear most, death. This is what Simon Jarvis seems to suggest that Adorno is arguing,⁴⁵⁰ adding that military and industrial self-destructiveness can be seen to emanate from a misguided sense of self-preservation which attempts to ward off death 'an indistinguishable reminder of the nature in culture'.⁴⁵¹ Secondly, and perhaps, more convincingly, we could interpret Adorno as suggesting that the mimetic response to nature has become dead and rigid in response to the disavowal of living nature through societal rationalisation.

The subjective *Spirit* which cancels the animation of nature can master a *deSpiritualised* nature only by imitating its rigidity and *deSpiritualising* itself in turn.⁴⁵²

I shall return to this thread of Adorno's thinking later when discussing 'Bourgeois Coldness'.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Adorno (1997) p. 57.

⁴⁵⁰ Jarvis (1998) p. 31.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵² Adorno (1997) p. 57.

⁴⁵³ This claim is also given a Marxist gloss in *Minima Moralia*, in relation to the shift in proportion of variable (living labour) and constant (means of production) capital.

'That which determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes, increases with the proportion of machines to variable capital' Adorno (1974) p. 229.

The shift in the composition of capital towards dead labour is reflected in an increasing rigidity and coldness in social relations.

6) Mimesis and Non-identity thinking

Having outlined Adorno's historical and anthropological account of societal rationalisation and the disavowal of mimetic experience I want to turn to its philosophical significance. At this level, the Hegelian structure of Adorno's argument becomes more apparent. In *Negative Dialectics*, as I have argued previously, the critique of societal rationalisation is addressed at the level of the concept. One of the central claims of *Negative Dialectics* is that to think conceptually is to disavow the content of that concept. To identify a particular we do not say what it *is* but what category or law it comes under. Adorno thinks that by 'identifying' an object we render it fixed and intransigent and leave it open to manipulation. The concept is, thus, an *instrument* of domination.

I have already distinguished between two interpretations of this claim. Firstly, there is the Habermas-Wellmer interpretation (which I rejected in the previous chapter) that Adorno is engaging in a critique of the *concept itself* and, thus bends towards irrationalism and mysticism. He leaves us only with some notion of 'aesthetic rationality' which is the other of discursive reason. A more sympathetic reading of Adorno, however, which I have pursued in this thesis, takes Adorno to be claiming that there is nothing wrong with conceptualism *per se*. Such abstraction is integral to all acts of cognition. The problem arises only when the concept claims cognitive self-sufficiency in relation to what stimulates it, its content. It is disavowal of the somatic or intuitive moment in cognition, through the mechanisms of repetition, objective distance and instrumentality that leads to reason's turn to the irrational. *Identity thinking* (best expressed in Kantian epistemology, but also in a range of modern philosophical positions from logical positivism to utilitarianism) is problematic once it claims to be the whole of reason.

This argument, as I have suggested, takes upon a very Hegelian character. Hegel's speculative approach, the process of demonstrating that two elements that appear radically opposed to each other are actually intrinsically related, can be seen to be at work in Adorno. This motif can be seen most visibly in the resemblance between Adorno's account of Myth and Enlightenment in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the section on Faith and Pure Insight in Hegel's Phenomenology. Hegel's famous discussion of Faith and Pure Insight, conceptually reconstructing the clash between Enlightenment and Religious faith, argues that each is equally dogmatic without the other. Pure insight treats faith as a mere projection of human consciousness into the outside world, with the object of faith not existing outside the subjective consciousness of the believer. However, in doing so, it falls into an empty scepticism with no content of its own:

We have therefore to see how pure insight and intention behaves in its negative attitude to that other which it finds confronting it. Pure insight and intention which takes up a negative attitude can only be, since its Notion is all essentiality and there is nothing outside it, the negative of itself. As insight, therefore, it becomes the negative of pure insight, becomes untruth and unreason, and, as intention, it becomes the negative of pure intention, becomes a lie and insincerity of purpose.⁴⁵⁴

Adorno and Horkheimer can be seen to be generalising such an account in their understanding of Myth and Enlightenment. The irrationality of Enlightenment thinking arises when it moves beyond the critique of irrational mythological belief patterns into a critique of all anthropomorphic projection. The ideal of enlightenment becomes knowledge stripped of all anthropomorphic connection. As Jay Bernstein argues,

⁴⁵⁴ Hegel (1977) p. 154.

The final picture of a disenchanted world [for Adorno] is...a world without the human, the human becoming only a distorting perspective on a world wholly and forever independent of it.⁴⁵⁵

Although Bernstein tends to impose his own ethical vocabulary onto Adorno's work, his interpretation is generally productive and demonstrates a level of critical engagement with Adorno's concerns that is missing from Habermas⁴⁵⁶ and Wellmer. The underlying claim, that, for Adorno, successful cognition is dependent upon a certain degree of anthropomorphism, is important to stress. We do not merely catalogue objects in the world according to formal rules but invest them with certain properties in terms of how they affect us somatically or what connections or associations they pre-consciously bring to mind. However, the richness of our capacity for experience, as in Benjamin, is seen to have become increasingly atrophied in the midst of industrial modernity. Adorno, like Benjamin, seeks to open up space for a form of experience, which involves receptive abandonment to the object. In the form of abandonment to the object we see a retreat from the (logical) domination of the object and (physical) domination of nature within and without.

7) Individual Freedom in Adorno

Where does this complex account of the interplay between reason and the somatic get us in terms of the main themes of the thesis? So far, I have argued that the idea of social constitution is closely bound up with a commitment to social autonomy. I have argued that the Hegelian concept of reconciliation, in which the idea of social autonomy can be seen to be rooted, is heavily compromised

⁴⁵⁵ Bernstein (2001) p. 92.

⁴⁵⁶ For example, see Robert Hullot-Kentor's 'Back to Adorno' in Delanty (ed.) (2004) for an account of how Habermas's critique of Adorno is closely related to his political manoeuvrings within the German philosophical establishment.

both by Hegel's idealist metaphysics and his conservative politics. However, in Adorno's hands, the idea of reconciliation becomes a powerful response to the problem of alienation. Like Hegel (and by extension Kant), Adorno is concerned with the development of social relations in which human beings are recognised as ends and not means. It is only within such social relations that human beings can be 'at home' in the world. In Hegel, this is expressed through the idea of *mutual recognition* (see Chapter Two) in which his primary concern is the nature of the social roles occupied by individuals. Adorno's emphasis is very different, however. As Adorno interprets the problem of alienation primarily in terms of a narrowing of what we take to be reason, reconciliation can be seen to refer not only to the nature of social relations but also to a less oppositional relationship between the rational and the somatic.

The key problem for Adorno, however, is how to approach the idea of reconciliation in a way that avoids both the empty and formal moralism of Kant and the limited historicism of Hegel. Adorno expounds this dialectic of critique clearly in the 'Marginalia to Theory and Practice'.

Kant's moral philosophy and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* represent two dialectical stages of the bourgeois self-consciousness of practice. Split as they are between the particular and the universal, the two poles which tear that consciousness apart, both are also false; each stage is right in opposition to the other so long as no possible higher figure of practice is revealed in reality.⁴⁵⁷

Kantian moral freedom is a 'conception incompatible with any empiricism',⁴⁵⁸ anticipating (in a distorted form) a free form of socialisation amongst individuals. It is false, however, in so far as it fails to connect with the real,

⁴⁵⁷ Adorno (1997) *Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis* p.765. Quoted in Schweppenhäuser (2004) p. 343.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

historical experience of social heteronomy. It is ideological in the sense discussed in Chapter Four. The Hegelian project, on the other hand, expresses the real experience of the domination of the universal yet, in doing so, conceptually liquidates the spontaneity of the individual.⁴⁵⁹

Furthermore, although Adorno takes Kantian thought to anticipate an end to social heteronomy, the *form* of Kantian moral freedom undermines and truncates our ability to imagine such a prospect. Whilst Kantian moral freedom points beyond current social heteronomy, its abstract and formalistic character fails to identify the basis of moral action itself. Adorno's criticism of Kantian moral thinking specifically, and modern moral philosophy more generally, is that moral action stems not from following universalisable moral laws but from a far more basic principle of *Solidarity*. Adorno alludes to this notion in reference to Brecht.

The impulse, naked physical fear, and the sense of *Solidarity* with what Brecht called tormentable bodies is immanent in moral conduct and would be denied in attempts at ruthless rationalisation.⁴⁶⁰

Adorno wants to argue that the motivation for ethical action should always be the direct experience of vulnerability or neediness, the response to which is spontaneous and immediate. What is attested to in much modern moral philosophy is the displacement of the experience of each other as unique and vulnerable *living* individuals with an 'externalist' appeal to putatively universal moral laws (for example moral principles or the categorical imperative). In contradistinction, it is our needy and vulnerable animality (our ability to

⁴⁵⁹ See Schweppenhäuser in Huhn (ed.) (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge) p342-344 for an incisive account of this dialectic.

⁴⁶⁰ Adorno (1973) p. 286.

experience hurt, pain and want) that Adorno sees as the locus of our ability to respond ethically. Importantly, it is this form of somatic reaction to suffering which is disavowed in the process of societal rationalisation. The displacement of the mimetic component of reason is, as I have argued, coordinated with the fungible and instrumental world of the *iron cage*. If Kantian moral philosophy is seen as expressing such displacement and hypostatising it, then, for Adorno, it must be seen as being partially complicit in human unfreedom.

In an important passage from *Negative Dialectics* Adorno furthers this claim:

No man should be tortured; there ought to be no concentration camps, while all of this continues in Asia and Africa and is repressed merely because, as ever, the humanity of civilisation is inhumane towards the people it shamelessly brands as uncivilised.

But if a moral philosopher were to seize upon these lines and to exult at having caught the critics of morality at last, caught them quoting the same values that are happily proclaimed by the philosophy of morals, his cogent conclusion would be false. The lines are true as an impulse, as a reaction to the news that torture is going on somewhere. They must not be rationalised; as an abstract principle they would fall promptly into the bad infinities of derivation and validity.⁴⁶¹

Later on in the text, this claim is raised in relation to Auschwitz, which, for Adorno, is exemplary of reason's instrumentalisation.⁴⁶² Auschwitz, as I have argued, is not treated by Adorno as a historical anomaly but an exemplary instance of human evil, which takes place within a broader context of 'Bourgeois

⁴⁶¹ Adorno (1973) p. 285.

⁴⁶² 'That the individual [Individuum] no longer died in the concentration camps, but rather the exemplar, has to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measures. Genocide is the absolute integration, which is everywhere being prepared, where human beings are made the same, polished, as the military calls it, until they are literally cancelled out, as deviations from the concept of their complete nullity. Auschwitz confirms the philosopheme of pure identity as death.' (Adorno, 1973 p335)

coldness'. Such indifference to human life can only arise in a culture in which human beings, at a broad level, are recognised only in terms of being cogs within a machine.

Adorno, as I have argued, claims that Auschwitz demands a 'new categorical imperative'. It is worth quoting this paragraph at length, as it is crucial to understanding what the demand for '*Solidarity*' amounts to:

Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again. This imperative is as unmanageable vis-à-vis its foundation as the given fact formerly was to the Kantian one. To treat it discursively would be heinous: in it the moment of the supplementary in what is moral can be bodily felt. Bodily, because it is the abhorrence, become practical, of the unbearable physical pain inflicted on individuals, even after individuality, as an intellectual form of reflection, is on the point of disappearing. Only in the unvarnished materialistic motive does morality survive.⁴⁶³

Note that Adorno's use of the term 'categorical imperative' appears to be an ironic inversion of Kant's. Firstly, the impulse behind the imperative is a particular, empirical, historical event. It is the experience of the fact of Auschwitz and our collective interest in preventing anything like this happening again that is the force of the imperative. Secondly, the imperative derives its force from the somatic, a *bodily* reaction of utter abhorrence to the event. This reaction is causal, an *involuntary* 'shudder' of disgust. Therefore, the force of Adorno's demand is not only that we organise our actions and thoughts to avoid the recurrence of genocide but that we reject *formal* notions of morality which are seen to be intrinsically bound up with the instrumentalisation of reason. If Auschwitz is the culmination of *identity thinking* then the only appropriate immediate response is somatic revulsion.

⁴⁶³ Adorno (1973) p. 365.

7) Some Critical Issues

Whilst I think Adorno provides a rather compelling historical/anthropological diagnosis of a world in which we have become largely unable to respond to the neediness and suffering of others, the extent to which he provides any substantial insight into how we can practically and theoretically re-orientate ourselves away from such a world is unclear. I have already gone through the arguments for Adorno's philosophical negativity in Chapter Four and his refusal to allude to the good positively. In light of the discussion of mimesis above, we can now understand the practical and moral form that such negativity takes as being somatic *Solidarity* with the suffering of others. However, as suggestive and powerful as such a notion is, it seems to face a number of obvious questions. Firstly, whereas, it would appear easy to make the claim that someone who seeks to derive the evilness of Auschwitz from a process of discursive moral argument is responding in a way which is morally flawed, this seems to be a far less obvious claim in cases where, for example, there are competing moral claims, twin evils or shades of grey. It is, surely, in such circumstances that moral and political philosophy comes into its element. Adorno, like Hegel, seems uninterested with the arduous attention to detail involved in moral philosophy and works in broad-brush strokes. For example, he argues, in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* that, within the context of radical evil, the only ethical path open is:

...the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through, and thus the ability to focus upon the power of resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us to a vastly greater degree. ⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ Adorno (2000) p. 168.

Such a claim seems to resist notions of their being lesser evils or pragmatic compromises and focuses attention solely on a seemingly utopian critique of the 'false whole'. I discuss the philosophical reasons for such negativity and minimalism in more detail below, but it is, perhaps, worth mentioning one thought at this point which is more tactical and political. Part of Adorno's concern would appear to be that over strenuous moral deliberation often tends to limit itself within choices which are proscribed by a world of 'radical evil' and fails to challenge the nature of this world itself. For example, we could take recent characterizations of current world events as a conflict between Islamic fundamentalism/totalitarianism and liberal democratic capitalism in which we all must take sides as indicative of the sort of 'false choices' which serve to ring-fence broader criticism of the status-quo.⁴⁶⁵ Certainly, Adorno's own comments in the preface to *Negative Dialectics*, where he proclaims himself prepared to 'face the rancor' of 'both camps' ⁴⁶⁶ (that is Western Capitalism and Soviet Communism) can be seen in a similar light. It is not that Adorno is naive enough to identify 'both camps' as the same or that he is ignorant enough to take the form of Soviet totalitarianism as identical to the forms of mass control in western consumerism. It is that the demand to 'take sides' is an ideological gesture which serves to constrain or bury more radical social criticism. Adorno is dissatisfied with any position that does not take the critique of the exchange society to be central and this generates a certain disinterest in the notion of politics as a pragmatic balancing of unsavory options.

⁴⁶⁵ See Žižek's preface to 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real' for a witty elucidation of such tactics.

⁴⁶⁶ Adorno (1973) p. ii.

A second question is that, again, whereas it may be obvious that Auschwitz was an act of evil, and that such a judgment requires no further rationalization, such a judgment is less obviously applied to seemingly trivial phenomena such as the culture industry or astrology,⁴⁶⁷ which Adorno wants to argue are intrinsically bound up with the world of 'radical evil'. Adorno expects us to take our revulsion at Auschwitz (as an exemplary act of evil) as a starting point from which to critically distance ourselves from the underlying context of evil that provides the conditions of possibility for such genocide. Adorno's remarks on seemingly innocent aspects of popular culture are often stark in terms of their explicit references to totalitarianism or Nazism. Describing the 'Jitterbug' dance craze, Adorno laments,

They call themselves jitterbugs, as if they simultaneously wanted to affirm and mock their loss of individuality, their transformation into beetles whirring around in fascination.⁴⁶⁸

Describing a Jazz performance he comments,

What is common to the Jazz enthusiast of all countries, however, is the moment of compliance, in parodistic exaggeration. In this respect their play recalls the brutal seriousness of the masses of the followers of totalitarian states...⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ See Adorno (1994) *The Stars Down to Earth* (Routledge, London) p. 46-172.

⁴⁶⁸ Arato (ed.) (1985) p. 292.

⁴⁶⁹ Adorno (1988) p.122.

Clearly, these assertions are not merely meant solely for rhetorical effect⁴⁷⁰ but are meant to make us reflect upon the sort of culture we inhabit and its complicity in forming and sustaining the cold, strategic social relations which are indifferent to barbarism. In this sense, the uniformity and conformity engendered by mass culture is seen as analogous to the uniformity and conformity of labour within the context of capitalist exchange and, subsequently, analogous to the absolute indifference to particular individuals within totalitarian regimes. They are only analogous in that they all engender a certain disposition towards the particular. Furthermore, such a disposition is taken to be a necessary precondition of the unleashing of totalitarian violence.⁴⁷¹

The emphasis on the context of 'bourgeois coldness' raises a third question as to whether or not the perpetrators of evil acts are made less culpable by being

⁴⁷⁰ Adorno certainly, in my view, means what he says and takes the extremity of many of his aphorisms and statements to be justified by the extremity of the circumstances in which they are composed. Having said this, it is important to understand the rhetorical strategies used by Adorno in order to understand his work. One of the most commonly used devices in Adorno's presentation is parataxis – the positioning of often extreme propositions in a manner which does not indicate relations of integration or subordination between them. This means of presentation evades (or circumscribes) the conceptual domination of the object by positioning concepts in a 'constellation' whereby each exists unsubordinated to the other.

⁴⁷¹ It may well be that we dispute some of the specific cultural criticisms made by Adorno, often more the result of a latent conservatism or inadequate breadth of knowledge, but this does not necessarily undermine the general ethical force of his social criticism, that we understand genocide not as a unique aberration but as part of a broader context of 'bourgeois coldness'. For considered and critical views on Adorno's interpretation of mass culture which remain sympathetic to his project see, for example, Kellner, D in Gibson, N and Rubin, A (eds.) (2004) 'Theodor W. Adorno and the Dialectics of Mass Culture' and Hullot-Kentor in Huhn (ed) (2004) 'Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being (especially p. 195-6)

situated within such a culture. If, as I have previously argued, Adorno thinks that there are no models available for living a good life, does this mean that the perpetrators of evil are excused? Adorno takes this to be a genuine aporia, not something to be 'settled by superior logic'.⁴⁷² Commenting on the 1965 Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, Adorno claims that 'acquittal would be a barefaced injustice'.⁴⁷³ Adorno, unusually for a Marxist, unflinchingly uses the term 'evil', firstly, to apply to a certain cold, instrumental disposition towards other human beings and, secondly, to refer to the context within such a disposition emerges. Adorno does not want to sympathise with the perpetrators of evil in any way but does not want critical enquiry to stop at mere condemnation. He is also concerned that the formal, universalism of legal judgement fails to capture the scale and depth of evil at issue in genocide. This concern with the abstract generality of legal judgement echoes remarks made previously in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Quoting Francis Bacon,

'Is not the rule, 'Si inaequalibus aequalia addas, omnia erunt inaequalia, an axiom of justice as well as of the mathematics? And is there not a true coincidence between commutative and distributive justice, and arithmetical and geometrical proportion? Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence.' It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities.⁴⁷⁴

Fourthly, it is ambiguous as to whether Adorno thinks there is something wrong with discursive moral argument per se. We could take Adorno to be making the strong claim that attempts of moral rationalization in the face of evil

⁴⁷² Adorno (1973) p. 287.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 286.

⁴⁷⁴ Adorno (1997) p. 7. As Julian Roberts points out, however, it is difficult to know exactly what Adorno and Horkheimer's target is here as responding to the particularity of individual cases is built into the nature of common law, in practice in both the US and UK. Julian Roberts (2005) *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (CUP, Cambridge).

are always somehow complicit in the suffering they respond to or the weaker claim that there is nothing wrong with forming moral rules, grounds or principles per se (for example constructing second order moral rules regarding what counts as treating someone as an end-in-itself and what counts as treating someone as a means-to-an-end). On the second view, it is only when we take such rules to be *constitutive* of what morality is, when the motivating somatic response to suffering is somehow forgotten or disavowed, that morality becomes complicit in human suffering and unfreedom. I take the second reading to be most plausible, although it is clear that Adorno thinks that there is something 'blasphemous' about a formal moral response to suffering. As Schweppenhäuser puts it, '[t]o dissolve the imperative into a chain of justifications is to laugh in the face of human dignity'.⁴⁷⁵

Finally, there is the question as to why theoretical grounding always results in a 'bad infinity'.⁴⁷⁶ Schweppenhäuser puts the problem as follows. Adorno wants to claim that discursive arguments necessarily end up in the form of some sort of 'ethical philosophy of principles'⁴⁷⁷ and seemingly wants to resist such rationalisation and universalisation in favour of a materialist form of morality whose only recourse is to the moral impulse. However, Adorno does seem to imply, for example, in the demand never to let Auschwitz reoccur, that moral propositions are universally ethically binding. In depriving moral propositions of

⁴⁷⁵ Huhn (ed.) (2004) p345 n44.

⁴⁷⁶ Hartnack defines bad infinity, following Hegel, as 'an endless series of finite items, that is, of items that, by necessity, are finite and also, by necessity, must continue to the next item. From the very fact that its continuation is logically built into it, it follows that there is a conflict between what the series requires, namely, its continuation to completion, and the logical impossibility of such a completion' (Hartnack, 1998 p21).

⁴⁷⁷ Schweppenhäuser in Huhn ed. (2004) p. 346.

their theoretical grounds, he seemingly undermines his own project which seeks (however tentatively) the good and right life through the critique of moral philosophy.⁴⁷⁸ However, that the demand never to let Auschwitz reoccur is formulated negatively suggests that Adorno does not intend to produce a fully-fledged moral philosophy. More precisely, Adorno does not think that such an attempt is possible in current circumstances; we can only say what should not be. The first step in the pursuit of the good life, and the only step Adorno believes to be currently available, is the negative recognition of what should not be, which stems from feelings of pain, neediness and empathy with the suffering of others. Hence, as Gunzelin Schmid Noerr suggests, Adorno does not seek to ground morality altogether but instead seeks ‘a *minimal morality* of respect for unafflicted life’.⁴⁷⁹

This recognition, however, forms the positive, redemptive element of Adorno’s thinking. That we still have the capacity to respond in terms of this minimal morality rules out total despair and opens up possibilities for thinking of a world in which such suffering is vanquished. This is what Adorno seems to be claiming in one of his more obscure metaphors in *Negative Dialectics*...

Greyness could not fill us with despair if our minds did not harbour the concept of different colours, scattered traces of which are not absent from the negative whole⁴⁸⁰

8) Conclusion

Through this discussion, I have attempted to make Adorno’s tentative notion of social autonomy qua *Solidarity* less opaque. The ‘Iron Cage’ of modernity is characterised by a certain type of rigid and instrumental thinking towards one

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁷⁹ Quoted in Schweppenhäuser in Huhn ed. (2004) p. 347.

⁴⁸⁰ Adorno (1973) p. 378.

another, the natural environment and our internal nature, which is complicit in social heteronomy. Human beings are viewed solely in terms of their fungibility, as cogs in a machine and not as needy and vulnerable ends in their own right, with such fungibility rooted in the relationship of exchange. Whereas Kantian moral freedom points beyond such circumstances of unfreedom, defined in terms of homogenisation and commoditisation (see Chapter Four), it is also complicit in such a process due to the abstract *form* it assumes. *Solidarity*, which Adorno implicitly contrasts with moral freedom, demands a materialist turn, whereby it is the spontaneous response to suffering inflects moral reflection. However, rather than simply privilege the somatic or the intuitive over the rational, Adorno indicts reason with having lost all substantive ends, for becoming irrational, as a consequence of its abstract form. This process, although understood as historical and social, is explored indirectly in Adorno, largely through its expression in philosophical texts. The idea of 'reconciliation', tentatively posits the reconciliation of sense and reason, or, more broadly, nature and culture. As I have argued, it is when '*identity thinking*' takes itself to be self-sufficient from disavowed nature that it becomes irrational. In current circumstances, however, the notion of reconciliation can only be understood in the negative, as a reaction to what should not be.

Conclusion

1) Introduction

By way of conclusion, I first want to summarise a number of key areas that have been investigated in the thesis in order to clearly identify the sense in which Adorno's attempts to move beyond Hegel contribute to understanding the problems of reconciliation and social constitution. In so doing, I want to also underline why remaining within the Hegelian trajectory of thought is so important to Adorno and why this gives him something of a critical edge over his second generation critics. Firstly, I look at the source of critique in each thinker, highlighting the employment of immanent as opposed to transcendent critique by both Hegel and Adorno. Following from this, I identify a common problem, alienation, which can be said to link both the issues of reconciliation and social constitution. Next, I re-examine the responses to this problem, concentrating upon Adorno's attempts to put Hegel back on his feet.

2) Sources of Critique

Adorno, as I have argued, constantly vacillates between presenting Hegel as a radical thinker and a reactionary apologist for Prussian despotism. In respect of the former, I have drawn attention to the close relationship between Hegel and Adorno's understanding of *immanent critique*. I have taken the take the essential characteristics of both Adorno and Hegel's understanding of immanent critique to be as follows.

- (1) Immanent critique proceeds only from within the norms and presuppositions of a particular social form.

- (2) Immanent critique aims to illuminate tension between ‘essence’⁴⁸¹ and ‘existence’, that is, the gaps between the conspicuous ethical claims societies use to legitimate themselves and the reality of those societies.
- (3) If there is a divergence between ‘essence’ and ‘existence’ then the historical genesis of such legitimating norms will be interrogated.
- (4) We could take three different positions on what this process delivers, the latter of which I associate with Hegel and Adorno. (a) The governing norm is redundant, utopian or idealistic and we are deceiving ourselves if we genuinely believe that it could be attained. We need to be realists and abandon ethical baggage. (b) Society must develop to the point where it ‘fits’ with its legitimating norms. (c) It is not only societal change that is needed. The governing norms themselves are deficient in such a way that inhibits the development of their full ethical capacity. We need to retrieve the *ideational content* of such norms from their contingent *form*, which may

⁴⁸¹ The use of the ‘Hegelese’ here can potentially obscure the point. Recall that, for Hegel, essence refers to the final-formal cause of a thing or concept. However, understanding something in terms of its essence is prior only in terms of explanation and not existence. The formal-final cause of a thing or concept is only realised through its coming into existence and is understood retrospectively. Hence, in terms of immanent critique, we may not immediately apprehend what the ‘essence’ of a norm is, for example freedom, equality, justice etc. as such an apprehension, from the point of view of those embedded in the society, only comes about in highlighting whether or not the norm is legitimately appealed to in terms of the real operation of that society. This may, furthermore, raise issues of coherency or consistency in the way the norm is understood. Therefore, the point of immanent critique is not to appeal to some ‘essential’ or foundational criteria that societies fail to live up to. Instead it is about illuminating the incompleteness of certain ethical standards in their own terms in order to point towards radical societal transformation.

be complicit in their failure to 'fit' with the society they legitimate. This is what I take to be Hegel and Adorno's approach.

(5) In terms of (c), which I take to be Hegel and Adorno's position, the understanding and interpretation of the norms in question will qualitatively change.

We could take the Marxist critique of 'bourgeois freedom' as a simple example. (1) Freedom is a key legitimating norm within modern capitalist societies. (2) Capitalism, however, requires that we are all forced to sell our labour power unless, that is, we are in the minority that have control of the means of production. Furthermore, capitalism relies upon the immiseration and disempowerment of vast sections of the global population. As such, the legitimating claim of freedom falls short of reality. (3) The modern notion of freedom historically arises alongside the inception of capitalism and is bound to the legitimation of the current social order. (4) This indicates a problem with the way the concept of freedom is constructed. On the one hand, the norm of 'freedom' has ideational content, appealing to ideals of self-determination, spontaneity and autonomy, which point beyond social heteronomy. On the other hand, the form which the norm of 'freedom' assumes within the context of capitalism limits this ethical capacity. The modern notion of freedom, it is argued, relies upon a separation between the economic and the political, i.e. between narrow legalistic freedom and a more substantial sense of freedom rooted in economic equality, which serves to conceal existing heteronomy. (5) An understanding of freedom, to bring existence into line with its essence, must incorporate notions of empowerment and redistribution.

Adorno's most explicit acknowledgement of his debt to Hegel in this respect comes in the *'Three Studies'*:

The most questionable, and therefore the best known, of Hegel's teachings, that what is [actual] is rational, was not merely apologetic. Rather, in Hegel reason finds itself constellated with freedom. Freedom and reason are nonsense without one another. The [actual] can be considered rational only in so far as the idea of freedom, that is, human beings genuine self-determination, shines through it.⁴⁸²

By claiming that Hegel's formulation here is not 'merely' apologetic, Adorno clearly differentiates himself from Karl Popper's allegations of 'moral and legal positivism'.⁴⁸³ However, Adorno *does* think that Hegel's version of determinate negation, or immanent critique, is *ultimately* apologetic for the status quo, that Hegel cuts dialectics 'short'.⁴⁸⁴ There are two reasons why Adorno thinks this, one which is more historically contingent and one which is more philosophical.

The first reason is that Adorno takes Hegel's advocacy of a capitalist economy to be hugely problematic in terms of Hegel's own project. Firstly, Hegel underestimates the ability of capitalist exchange to ruthlessly undermine ethical norms. For example, the exchange society damages both the norms of love and fidelity in the family⁴⁸⁵ and, in the public sphere, makes instrumentalism, egotism, consumption and profitability the highest values.⁴⁸⁶ Secondly, the governing concept of capitalism is that of providing for the economic needs of the populace and yet it intrinsically produces mass social inequality and poverty. This means that not only does capitalism fail to live up to its concept but that a

⁴⁸² Adorno (1993) p. 44.

⁴⁸³ Popper (1969) p. 41.

⁴⁸⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 344.

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, Adorno (1974) pp. 30-2.

⁴⁸⁶ See, for example, Adorno (1973) pp. 35-37.

significant proportion of the populace are unable to participate in the benefits of ethical life. This is something that Hegel accepts, yet has no real answer for:

The poor still have the needs common to civil society, and yet since society has withdrawn from them the natural means of acquisition and broken the bond of the family — in the wider sense of the clan — their poverty leaves them more or less deprived of all the advantages of society... ⁴⁸⁷

Thirdly, the alienating nature of wage labour undermines the possibility of mutual recognition (I deal with this point in more detail below). All these objections do not challenge the philosophical structure of Hegelian determinate negation but simply take Hegel to task for not pursuing his critique further. Instead of rather stoically accepting the failings of capitalism, Hegel should have made the move made by many of the Young Hegelians in arguing that transcendence of capitalism is essential to fully realise ethical life.

Adorno's philosophical challenge to Hegelian determinate negation revolves around the notion of the negation of the negation, the idea that to negate a negative generates a positive. Critique always progresses from lower to higher states, with each successive negation guaranteeing a synthesis at a higher level. Adorno rejects such teleology, with its associated progressive conception of human history.

No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.⁴⁸⁸

For Adorno, critique is open ended and does not follow a teleological path. Furthermore, Adorno challenges the fact that negation, for Hegel, comes to rest in the *Absolute*. Not only does Adorno think that critique is unending, but he deems the structure of Hegel's *Absolute* to be analogous to the structure of

⁴⁸⁷ Hegel (1991) p. 265.

⁴⁸⁸ Adorno (1973) p. 320.

capital. What is presented in Hegel as the culmination of human reason and freedom is, in effect, identical in structure to the domination of particularity within the universal, characteristic of the exchange society.

Fundamentally, Adorno thinks that the negation of the negation, in Hegel, is a form of positivism. For example, to critique the necessity state (the state as a mere guarantor for market transactions in civil society) in terms of its tendency to promote societal atomism, Hegel moves to the notion of the universal state, which represents the general interest and can supposedly mitigate the contradictions of civil society. Hegel cannot move outside the form of the state itself. To take a more contemporary example, we could think of liberal feminism as embodying this form of negation of the negation. The liberal feminist, for example, would take the solution to large scale inequality in female representation in senior management to be found in more women developing the skills and personality attributes needed to 'get by' at this level. If the negation of the negation is taken to be the negation of negative conditions, however, the problem is viewed in broader terms. One can begin to challenge the sort of expectations of what one is to *be* in order to 'get by' for both men and women in modern society. I have already questioned the extent to which Adorno's interpretation of the negation of the negation is accurate. For example, I have mentioned Dunayevskaya's suggestion that the *Absolute* constitutes a 'new beginning' rather than an end point. and looked at interpretations of Hegel's logic which leave room open for retrogression as well as progression.⁴⁸⁹ In a sense, however, this is a moot point given that I have argued that what gives Adorno's understanding of negation its radical force is the commitment to social constitution and the possibility of radical societal transformation. Adorno's

⁴⁸⁹ See the discussion in Chapter Three, section three.

radical social critique is made possible by his refusal to interpret social forms as anything other than the constructs of flesh-and-blood human beings. This is something that is ultimately denied in Hegel's metaphysics.

3) Alienation

Having examined the basis of critique in both Hegel and Adorno, the next question is whether they identify the same problem? At one level, we can argue that both see *alienation* as *the* central problem of political philosophy, not pluralism, justice, or liberty. Are they talking about the same thing, however? Firstly, there is the question of historical genesis. In Hegel, alienation comes to the fore following the break up of the Greek polis. With the arrival of the principle of subjectivity, introduced through Christianity, a series of diremptions open up, between man and nature, reason and desire, individual and society and self-determination and fate. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Hegel believes, the conditions are in place such that the wholeness of the Greek polis can be recovered in a form that can accommodate the principle of subjectivity. He sees it as his job to convince his contemporaries that this is the case. For Adorno, alienation is bound up with societal rationalisation, a process which is intensified with the growth of modern capitalism but has far deeper primordial origin in the attempt to know and manipulate nature. I will address the significance of this difference in the next section.

Secondly, there is the question of what is understood by alienation. For Hegel, alienation refers to the three divisions outlined in Chapter One, of man and his own nature, external nature and society, all of which contribute to a sense of atomisation, anxiety and unhappiness amongst subjects. We can see a similar usage of the term in Marx's early writings,⁴⁹⁰ although anchored in the

⁴⁹⁰ See Marx (1975) pp. 322-334.

relationship of wage labour and not in the self-externalisation of *Spirit*. This sense of alienation is alluded to in Adorno's notion of 'damaged life'. For Adorno, following Lukacs, we are also talking about alienation in terms of reification. Reification refers to the attribution of immutability to social and historical processes, literally translated as 'to make thing-like'. Adorno, however, makes the further move of understanding reification in terms of '*identity thinking*' by which he means a form of conceptualisation which takes reason to have self-sufficiency above and beyond what it increasingly takes to be contingent, for example language, tradition, sense and intuition. Concepts, like the social relations of modern capitalism, are rendered fixed and immutable. How are we to make sense of this apparent plurality of understandings? At one level, it would appear that Adorno and Hegel identify a similar problem, that of atomisation, anxiety and unhappiness. Furthermore, both Hegel and Adorno are concerned with the conflicts between man and nature, reason and desire and individual and society and treat such conflicts as integral to understanding the problem of alienation. However, there is a shift in emphasis in Adorno towards an understanding of alienation in terms of the objectification of social processes and the consequent objectification of human subjects.⁴⁹¹ The critique of alienation is closely bound to the problem of social constitution. However, as I have argued, Adorno advances such a critique in Hegelian language, describing the processes of inversion and objectification in modern capitalism via analogy with Hegel's concept of Spirit (see Chapter Three). Furthermore, the critique of identity thinking as a form of reason that disavows the very mediations which make it possible takes upon a Hegelian form (see Chapter Four).

⁴⁹¹ This is something Hegel is also concerned with – see for example the section on the principle of utility in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel (1977) p587).

4) Recognition

In terms of envisaging a resolution to the problem of alienation we are given two seemingly opposing answers. For Hegel, alienation can be alleviated (1) at the level of objective *Spirit* through participating in the institutions and practices of ethical life and (2) at the level of absolute *Spirit*, where, though religion, philosophy and art, one comprehends oneself as a vehicle of *Spirit*. In Adorno, however, the pursuit of reconciliation takes the form of a ceaseless refusal to play along with current forms of heteronomy. What are we to make of such a divergence? Leaving aside the political differences raised above, we can, on one level, see similarities in the *type* of resolution being sought. Both Adorno and Hegel seek the overcoming of alienation and mutual indifference through the establishment of social relations in which individuals are awarded moral status as autonomous beings by one another. In Hegel, mutual recognition entails recognising individuals as ‘something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it’.⁴⁹² This Kantian⁴⁹³ thought is also strongly evident in Adorno’s notion of ‘*Solidarity...with tormentable bodies*’.⁴⁹⁴ What motivates the bodily expression of *Solidarity* is precisely the treatment of human beings as objects and not as moral, autonomous individuals. The impulse of *Solidarity* demands that we value human life, in the context of its debasement. In so doing, we must attribute an excess to the other, a sense of independence or self-determination that is inviolable.

⁴⁹² Hegel (1977) p. 112.

⁴⁹³ ‘So act that you use your humanity, whether in your own person in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means’ Kant (1990) p. 80.

⁴⁹⁴ Adorno (1973) p. 286.

In addition, there seems to be a double-move which is common to both Hegel's notion of mutual recognition and Adorno's notion of *Solidarity*. Because the attribution of autonomy to the other is established mutually, i.e. one's sense of autonomy is contingent upon its recognition by the other and visa versa; it is also simultaneously a bounding of autonomy. That senses of autonomy are interdependent debar one party from developing its own sense of autonomy, or discretionary powers, at the expense of the other. In other words, because of the nature of the conditions necessary for realising a genuine sense of autonomy, autonomy is necessarily bounded by ethical obligation. In Hegel's master-slave dialectic, for example, the master's failure to recognise the slave as an autonomous being debases his own sense of autonomous identity. In Adorno, a similar thought is expressed in terms of two key ethical principles, autonomy (*Mündigkeit*) and humility (*Bescheidenheit*),⁴⁹⁵ each of which keeps the other in check. In the dialectic of *Solidarity*, autonomy is both asserted and bounded in the desire 'to do justice to what is other'.⁴⁹⁶

Hegel's discussion of the French Revolution also raises an interesting point of comparison in this respect. Recall that Hegel attributes the 'fury of destruction' of the revolutionary terror⁴⁹⁷ to a certain conception of the will, which takes all determination and particularisation as a compromise to the will's universality. Hegel conceives of the will in terms of two components, the particular will, which commits to determinate choices, and the universal will, which is the capacity to rise above the determinate position of the individual and consider that one could have always chosen differently. In the revolutionary terror, any

⁴⁹⁵ See Finlayson (2002) for a more detailed discussion of such ethical terms in Adorno.

⁴⁹⁶ Adorno (2000) p. 251.

⁴⁹⁷ Hegel (1977) p. 359.

particular determination of the will (for example in terms of a social or constitutional role) is not tolerated. This unbounded, universal will begins to lose any sense of recognition of the particularity of other individuals, i.e. what they have determinately made of themselves. The abstract will, unchecked in this way, has no discernable subject.

Is there not a strong connection here with Adorno's description of the cold, instrumental modern subject? In the process of societal rationalisation, the subject acts so as to eliminate any residue of mutual obligation, social boundedness and natural compulsion in seeking to master itself, others and external nature. In the attempt to eliminate any sense of ourselves as bounded, natural beings, subjects come to treat other people ever more strategically and instrumentally. Such indifference to the particularity of others reaches its apogee in genocide. As in the revolutionary terror, Nazi genocide treats its victims not as individuals but as anonymous specimens. Such extreme indifference to individuality is movingly conveyed by Primo Levi:

Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead in them, already too empty to already suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.

They crowd my memory with their faceless presence, and if I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of thought is to be seen.⁴⁹⁸

Such a characterisation of the death camps is echoed in Adorno:

⁴⁹⁸ Levi, P. (1961) *Survival* Translated by Stuart Woolf (Macmillan, New York) p. 90.

That the individual [Individuum] no longer died in the concentration camps, but rather the exemplar, has to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measures. Genocide is the absolute integration, which is everywhere being prepared, where human beings are made the same, polished, as the military calls it, until they are literally cancelled out, as deviations from the concept of their complete nullity.⁴⁹⁹

Compare this to Hegel on the revolutionary terror:

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated [i.e. the individual] is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.⁵⁰⁰

So far both Hegel and Adorno appear to be appealing to a notion of reconciliation which fits the core structure that I outlined in the introduction, of a sense of autonomy which consists in 'being-in-oneself-in-another'. In so doing, one does not lose one's personal autonomy but gains a fuller and more fundamental sense of autonomy. However, in terms of the question of 'what is to be done' the answers they give are radically different. For Hegel, mutual recognition is already instantiated into the fabric of ethical life and hence the subject can attain its autonomy through reconciliation. For Adorno, however, although the demand for recognition shares a similar structure to his notion of *Solidarity*, autonomy, given the current state of the world, demands a refusal to play along, rather than reconciliation:

The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is *Mündigkeit*, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of self-determination, of not cooperating.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Adorno (1973) p. 335.

⁵⁰⁰ Hegel (1977) p. 360.

The difference in strategy is not solely reducible to the fact that Hegel was broadly optimistic about the direction that the world was taking, whereas Adorno was an abject pessimist. Again, the issue of social constitution is central? Recall the classical distinction made between Marxists and Hegelians, that between 'materialism' and 'idealism'. Adorno accepts much of the classical Marxist 'materialist' critique of Hegel, in terms of his characterisation of the *Absolute*. Firstly, Hegel mistakenly attributes historical change to the self-development of *Spirit* rather than human agency. Secondly, even if we interpret Hegel's notion of *Spirit* as *really* alluding to social relations, Hegel is mistaken in identifying the final or highest form of society with capital relations, which are historically transitory.

There is a further 'materialist' turn relating to the Hegelian insistence that the world is accessible to conceptual understanding *all the way down* and that the concept can grasp the *particularity* of objects. Unlike Kant, for whom the categories of the understanding grasp objects only as phenomena and not as they are in-themselves, Hegel thinks that the essential structure of the world is ultimately identical to that of the rational concept. As I explained in Chapter Two, the rational concept comprises immediate unity, difference and mediated unity and is the structure of the *Absolute*, which, for Hegel, is the unity of both subject and substance. For Adorno, as I have previously argued, the insistence on the inherent conceptuality of objects means that Hegel is not really grasping the particular at all, only the concept of particularity:

⁵⁰¹ Adorno (1998) *Critical Models* translated by Henry Pickford (Columbia University Press, New York) p. 195.

His logic deals only with particularity, which is already conceptual. Thus established, the logical primacy of the universal provides a fundament for the social and political primacy that Hegel is opting for.⁵⁰²

For Adorno, particularity cannot be fully captured conceptually. There is always an excess which is progressively disavowed in the process of concept formation. Adorno thinks that this excess is registered in a different way from conceptualisation, in terms of the somatic or attitudinal effects generated by the object. This is what Adorno means by the transition to the 'priority of the object' and it is this understanding of 'materialism' which separates Adorno not only from Hegel but also from his second generation critics.

From this point, many of the criticisms of Adorno made by the second generation critical theorists can be viewed as relying upon precisely the sort of hypostasised distinctions that an account of social constitution seeks to undermine. Rather than, as in Habermas, begin with a procedural separation of norm and historical genesis, Adorno gives us an account of the formation of social norms which elucidates their contamination by being situated within the exchange society and yet refuses to relinquish the possibility of its overcoming. Furthermore, the 'materialist' dimension of Adorno's account of social constitution can be seen to respond to two further accusations made by the second generation critical theorists. Firstly, there is the accusation that Adorno remains within the 'philosophy of consciousness' in focusing only on the subject-object relation in the discussion of reconciliation. I have argued that, whilst this is certainly not Adorno's sole focus, Adorno, unlike Habermas, believes that reconciliation cannot be understood solely in terms of a theory of inter-subjectivity. It is Habermas's thinking, which is left wanting in attempting

⁵⁰² Adorno (1973) p. 326.

to dissolve such problems. Secondly, there is the attribution to Adorno of an extreme philosophical negativism, which advances social critique only from the standpoint of an 'aesthetic rationality'. Again, I have argued that this is not the case (see the account of immanent critique above) and that, furthermore, Adorno's account of experience demonstrates that the resources for reconciliation are immanent to the structure of experience itself.

Interpreting Adorno in this way also helps answer some of the criticisms levelled by Michael Rosen. Recall that Rosen takes Adorno to be faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, in the 'transition to the priority of the object' Adorno wants to give objects a greater role in cognition. However, being a materialist thinker, he cannot claim that the world of objects has any inherent meaning. Meaning is only something that we impose upon nature. Rosen sees Adorno's claim that objects are 'sedimented history' as amounting to a claim that objects have a kind of inherent meaningfulness. This claim could only be advanced by relying on the sort of metaphysical schema advanced by Hegel as, for Hegel, the world is inherently meaningful only because it is ultimately identical with the meta-subject, *Spirit*.⁵⁰³ I have, however, argued that Rosen moves too quickly in making such an assertion. What Adorno means by 'sedimented history' is the idea that we grasp the external world through meanings which are created in and through the 'social totality'. Such socially and historically constituted meanings have objectivity in that they are not reducible to any individual.⁵⁰⁴ They are, however, a product of human agency and not of the evolution of *Spirit* so it is difficult to describe the position as idealist unless one is defining materialism in a very different sense to how it is employed in the Marxist tradition.

⁵⁰³ See Rosen (1993) p. 104-5.

⁵⁰⁴ See O' Connor (2005) p. 170-173 for a good discussion of 'sedimented history'

Furthermore, I have argued that there is no reason to think that the stress on the somatic role in cognition involves awarding any inherent meaningfulness to objects. What Adorno is doing is making the claim that we experience objects in terms of two dimensions of cognition, one which registers the object in terms of what concept it comes under and one which registers the object in terms of the attitudinal effects it generates. This, as I have argued, gives Adorno a richer account of experience than many of his critics.

6) Concluding Remarks

Whilst I have argued that Adorno's account of reconciliation is neither incoherent (contra Habermas) nor established upon some of the more questionable theses of German Idealism (contra Rosen), I still take it to be unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is difficult not to think of Hegel's famous description of the 'beautiful soul' when thinking about Adorno's response to endemic suffering and injustice:

It [the beautiful soul] lacks force to externalize itself, the power to make itself a thing, and endure existence. It lives in dread of staining the radiance of its inner being by action and existence. And to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with actuality, and steadfastly perseveres in a state of self-willed impotence to renounce a self which is pared away to the last point of abstraction, and to give itself substantial existence, or, in other words, to transform its thought into being, and commit itself to absolute distinction [that between thought and being]. The hollow object, which it produces, now fills it, therefore, with the feeling of emptiness. Its activity consists in yearning, which merely loses itself in becoming an unsubstantial shadowy object, and, rising above this loss and falling back on itself, finds itself merely as lost. In this transparent purity of its moments it becomes a sorrow-laden beautiful soul, as it is called; its light dims and dies within it, and it vanishes as a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁵ Hegel (1977) p. 658.

Was Adorno's refusal to 'join in' with the establishment, coupled with his equally adamant refusal to take part in organised political resistance, not evidence of a stubborn refusal to contemplate difficult compromises, even if such pragmatism could achieve tangible if tainted benefits for humankind? Worse still, was Lukacs not right that Adorno's philosophical negativism was an indulgence available only to the wealthy and that his taking up residence at the 'Grand Hotel Abyss'⁵⁰⁶ demonstrated an utter disinterest in making concrete gains for the poor and vulnerable? On the one hand, Lukacs' remarks appear wholly unfair, given his own bourgeois background and the several-compromises-too-far he later made as part of the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party. Furthermore, given what much of the organised left had become as a consequence of the Soviet Union, it is easy to interpret Adorno's scepticism as warranted. However, it is difficult to be as charitable as regards his dismissive attitude towards the upheavals of 1968. Adorno seems to have little interest in moving beyond mere negation and considering how to harness the potentialities opened up in the struggle against capital.

Has Adorno, therefore, anything of substance to offer to contemporary radicals? I have already argued that there are tensions in his position between resignation and resistance. On the one hand, these tensions relate to the movement between a strong and a weak negativism or, in other words, to a conflict between the view that the world is wholly devoid of goodness and the view that the world contains pockets of goodness in resistance to the false whole. On the other hand, Adorno seems torn on the question as to whether negation merely terminates at knowledge of the bad or whether it delivers a more positive

⁵⁰⁶ Lukacs, Georg (1971) *Theory of the Novel* translated by Anna Bostock (London, Merlin Press) p. ii.

potential for societal transformation. These tensions have to be understood as arising from the dire political circumstances of his times.

Adorno's sense of resistance, however, tends to be restricted to the areas of aesthetics and education if it is articulated at all. As regards to the former, even if we are to accept Robert Hullot-Kentor's⁵⁰⁷ suggestion that Adorno's aesthetic critique should not essentially limit us to a small number of works in Schoenberg's free atonal period, it still appears too limited to have a broad import. Whilst I strongly reject the idea that the narrowness of Adorno's aesthetic critique is driven by elitism, as opposed to stringent and scholarly aesthetic criteria⁵⁰⁸, its implications are surely severely restricted in terms of the numbers of those with the time available or educational opportunities to develop an interest in, for example, atonal music. This said, in challenging the subjugation of art to politics and, instead, insisting upon art as a source of political insight in its own right, Adorno awards the aesthetic with a role in political resistance that Marxist orthodoxy had stripped it of.

It is in the area of education where Adorno makes some of his seemingly more practically focused suggestions. In, *Education for Autonomy*,⁵⁰⁹ for example, he argues for an egalitarian educational system in which talent is treated as something to be learnt in free play and not assumed to be a natural property. He

⁵⁰⁷ Hullot-Kentor in Huhn (ed) (2004) 'Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being (especially p. 195-6)

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., It is important to remember that Adorno did not just hate Jazz and popular culture but also most of what passed for high-culture, e.g. Dvorak, Sibelius, Stravinsky (and most of Schoenberg's non free-atonal repitioire)

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⁵⁰⁹ Adorno, T. And Becker, H. (1983) *Education for Autonomy*. Translated in *Telos* Vol. 55-6 p. 103-10.

advocates student lead learning, strongly criticising restrictive curricular prescription, as a means to motivate a non-instrumental love of knowledge and, overall, sees education as a bedrock of critical and autonomous thinking in a context in which such faculties are very much restricted.

If such moves appear rather modest, then we need not restrict the reading of Adorno to his own self-interpretation.⁵¹⁰ Many in the 'Open Marxist' tradition⁵¹¹ have used Adorno's thought to address modern forms of struggle and resistance. For John Holloway, for example, it is to emerging movements in the developing world where inspiration is to be found. The Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, Mexico, for example, provides an interesting model of an open-ended, non-vanguardist⁵¹² struggle which evolves in accordance with its own ends of participatory democracy and the realisation of human dignity against its denial. The form of political organisation of movements such as the Zapatista's offers much promise in demonstrating what an Adornian politics might look like although, however, the restriction of such models to indigenous struggles in developing communities is a severe limitation upon their import for the industrialised west.

I think, however, that the two themes stemming from Adorno's Hegelian Marxism with the most enduring relevance are those I have developed in this thesis. Firstly, there are the ethical implications of interpreting freedom as

⁵¹⁰ As Adorno does not in relation to reading Hegel. See Chapter Three.

⁵¹¹ See, for example, Holloway, J. (2002) *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (Pluto, London) and Bonefeld and Tischler (ed.) (2002) *What is to be Done – Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today* (Ashgate, Burlington) for two Open Marxist works which examine the question of political practice.

⁵¹² It does not rely upon an enlightened revolutionary leadership but is rooted in discussion at every level of the community.

reconciliation or social autonomy. As I have argued, I take Adorno to continue in an ethical tradition which runs from Kant's conception of human beings as to be treated as 'ends in themselves', though Hegel's notion of 'mutual recognition' through Marx's critique of alienation and fetishism. If anything, such ethical imperatives are more pressing in the light of 20th century history than in the lifetime of those thinkers. Widespread human rights abuses, the persistence of extreme global poverty and starvation, the degrading and banal nature of modern labour and the global prevalence of violent conflict fuelled by grubby self-interest can all be seen as attesting to a deep-seated problem of alienation and mutual indifference. Adopting the notion of '*Solidarity*' as a response to such barbarism requires the adoption of tight ethical constraints and a rejection of the cold instrumentalism of Marxist-Leninism and the apologia for barbarism commonplace amongst many orthodox Marxists.⁵¹³ If the aim of socialism is the abolition of human suffering and the realisation of human dignity then the means to deliver it must be consistent with such an end.

Finally, there is the question of Adorno's contribution to the idea of social constitution. The seemingly most unattractive feature of Adorno's thought, its utopian refusal to adopt a 'realistic' or 'pragmatic' stance towards the plethora of problems facing the modern world, can also be read as its greatest strength. Recall that Adorno invokes the Judaic image ban as a tool not to self-indulgently disconnect utopia from the immediate problems of the here and now but to starkly highlight how hellish the world has become and how deep seated such

⁵¹³ See, for example, Lenin, V.I. (1966) 1920 Speech at the 3rd Komosol Congress, 2 Oct 1920 in *Collected Works Vol. 31* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Progress Publishing, Moscow) and Trotsky, L., Dewey, J. And Novach, G. (1982) *Their Morals and Ours* (New York, Pathfinder).

problems are. It is only through his understanding of social constitution, developed through Hegel, that he can so uncompromisingly lambaste the world of 'universal fungibility' and yet refuse to relinquish the possibility of its overcoming.

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