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# TELOS

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## CRITICAL THEORY: NEW DISCUSSIONS

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## *Introduction*

Critical Theory developed in response to the specific historical developments of twentieth-century Europe: war and revolution, the transformation of Communism into Stalinism, and the rise of Nazi Germany. Combining the legacy of German philosophical idealism with the tradition of critics of idealism—Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Marx, and Nietzsche—Critical Theory also built on the emergent social theory, especially Weber’s analysis of modernity and his one overriding theme, bureaucratization. For Weber, creative innovations that transform social life and that take shape especially through religious genius as charismatic prophecy succumb to the dead weight of the world: however animating the idea, however compelling the vision, its spirit flags, worn down by the inertia of life. This decline transpires, tragically, as a consequence of the efforts to implement the ideals: first comes the prophecy, then comes its management, which finally snuffs it out. This deadly logic of bureaucratization marks the fate of both capitalism and socialism; it is the institutional form of rationalization. Indeed, modernity faces two alternative threats: the stultifying embrace of bureaucratic rationalization and its opposite, the seductive irrationalism that promises fulfillment but only makes matters worse. The pessimism stereotypically associated with Adorno derives significantly from Weber’s bleak vision, the choice between charismatic dictators and anemic bureaucrats, while reserving a very small and unstable position for an objective thoughtfulness—where reason and values might momentarily coincide.

Charisma and bureaucracy, the constellation under which Critical Theory was born, describes our own historical moment as well. On the one hand: a popular leader radiates personal appeal, apparently still unencumbered by any mundanely identifiable policy positions and, as of this writing, still floating above the clouds of partisan fog. On the other: a historic transformation of the political economy of capitalism is underway, an intrusion of the state into the economy on a scale still too hard to grasp. Nor will we be able to grasp it soon enough, since so little debate is allowed to take place (so much for a “public sphere” of rationality), so little consideration of the numerous measures and their consequences, since the press long ago surrendered its capacity for criticism. True, we do learn of the various personal scandals of the political class and its habit of not paying taxes. Important as this muckraking certainly is, it is a sideshow to the social transformation now taking place, a process that makes Critical Theory all the more relevant as the authoritarian state reemerges.

Weber's focus on bureaucratization reflected his German context and its particular version of state power. Yet it also belonged to a stage in the social-economic history of capitalism, the transition from nineteenth-century liberalism of independent entrepreneurs to the organized capitalism that intersected with state power and pursued a management of ever greater spheres of life. Critical Theory inherited and developed that account, and, for *Telos*, reading Critical Theory often involved the recognition that the era of bureaucratization itself appeared to have become historical during the last third of the twentieth century. Watergate led to a challenge to state power from the left, as did Thatcher and Reagan from the right. Neo-liberal ascendancy in the decades of globalization seemed to roll back the state in the West, just as the collapse of the Soviet Union meant reprivatization in the East. As the bureaucratic state receded, despite the resistance of the "new class," *Telos* raised questions about what might take its place. Discussions of populism, federalism, tradition, and religion followed in these pages. Today, however, the question we face is whether that moment of deregulation (with all of its economic, social, and cultural consequences) really represented a sea change in social history or whether it was just a brief episode and Weber would be proven right after all, through an inexorable reassertion of the logic of bureaucracy. The State returns.

Weber famously described how the force of rationalization shatters life into several distinct value spheres, ultimately incommensurable arenas of experience, among which we move, without ever achieving integration. We accept this condition as suppleness, or we stumble over its inconsistencies. This issue of *Telos* looks at aspects of Critical Theory and some cognate traditions across several of these spheres—morality, aesthetics, intellectual life, and religion—in order to understand the limits of the tradition as well as to point out the challenges for its future.

Social critics of all stripes, and not only Critical Theory by any means, claim to be able to call aspects of the existing order into question. To do so assumes some logical basis for that criticism, but that intellectual move can have significant consequences for the consistency and credibility of the criticism. James Gordon Finlayson provides an elaborate and systematic account of the underpinning of Frankfurt School criticism, its problem with norms. As he writes, "No one disputes that Critical Theory has normative aims, but it is harder than it looks to state what these are." Indeed in many ways first-generation Critical Theorists harbored deep apprehensions about traditional moral criteria, both because of a modernist bias against traditionalism and because customary values seemed helpless in the face of twentieth-century political violence. Hence a turn away from a specifically moral discourse and to psychoanalysis as well as various social-theoretical assertions. Finlayson provides a careful dissection of this problem in the history of Critical Theory and traces how subsequent thinkers, Habermas and Honneth, tried to articulate alternative solutions.

One of the most distinctive features of Frankfurt School neo-Marxism is the shift of attention away from narratives of a revolutionary proletariat to a focus on culture and, especially, the work of art. For Adorno, social criticism has passed from the political movements, viewed as being subsumed by structures of power, and into the realm of art. Through the integrity of hermetic form, the work of art manages to escape the perpetual exchange of market logic. Meanwhile, Benjamin anchors his version of aesthetics in the dynamic of technological transformation. Yet, as Joshua Rayman shows, neither Benjamin nor Horkheimer and Adorno can escape metaphysics, and therefore, on a fundamental level, all run the risk of the same conformism of which they accuse their opponents. Still, Rayman can suggest how Critical Theory might be able to overcome the metaphysical burden it has never fully escaped.

A further hallmark of Critical Theory, especially of Adorno, is the difficulty of his prose, a feature sometimes seen as a corollary to his valorization of hermetic art: always a tough nut to crack. As distinct as Adorno's writing style may be, the resistance to his challenging texts is indicative of the reception of continental philosophy more broadly. Is it truly more difficult to read than, say, sophisticated analytic philosophy, legal documents, or any other specialized discourse? More likely, resentment derives from the tension between challenging prose and the critical message. Nicholas Joll examines this problem by asking how and why clarity can be a proper expectation of philosophical texts.

Sigrid Weigel provides a welcome guide to a different sort of writing and thinking, Hannah Arendt's philosophical journals, her *Denktagebuch*. They present the private side of the increasingly prominent public thinker. Literature, philosophy, and political reflection intertwine. What looms largest, though, is the quality of language as metaphor and its specific relationship to thought, or as Weigel puts it: "the representationality or figurativity of language reflects a fundamental requirement for all thought. The same words can be understood as concepts *or* metaphors, yet their designation as metaphor reflects the moment of transmission that is always inscribed in them—at least when it is a question of the designation of the invisible. Therefore, metaphors also maintain a closer relationship to truth than do concepts . . ." As metaphor, however, language is poetic, and precisely therefore philosophical, but it is also in metaphor that thought becomes corporeal. Weigel extends this discussion of language into a perspicacious treatment of Arendt's reflections on love and its disappearance.

A set of three essays leads through a discussion of religion, a topic that has emerged as a no longer secret focus of Critical Theory. Jean-Michel Landry provides an astute account of Michel Foucault's unpublished 1980 lectures *On the Government of the Living*. In effect a foundation to the *History of Sexuality*, the lectures interrogate the origins of Western subjectivity through Christianity and its various disciplinary practices, in particular confession: "By demanding that the Christian speak the truth about himself, he is forced on a quest that can only be

undertaken from a position that brings him into subjection—since the relationship of the subject to his own ‘truth’ is mediated by an Other, and this Other requires submission and dependency. Behind confession lies a political technology of obedience.” Foucault treats Christianity as exclusively a mechanism of domination that becomes the foundation of modern structures of political control, even or especially when they come in secular garb. To all this Thomas Lynch presents a robust response. The notion that modern technologies of power derive directly from early Christianity turns out to be difficult to maintain. More importantly, as Lynch shows, Foucault misunderstood the monastic culture in which practices of confession emerged and which, rather than representing abject submission, indicated a “striving for a special excellence” (in Elizabeth Clark’s words). While Lynch concedes that Christianity can participate in structures of domination, it can—drawing on Augustine and other traditions—also provide a source for a critique of domination: “Christianity affirms a notion of the self and its corresponding disciplines that refuses coercive domination and rejects the disciplines of structures that cannot conceive of discipline in any other way.” Aaron Riches concludes the religion discussion, proceeding from an exchange between Carl Schmitt and Jacob Taubes and into an elaboration of the Pauline theology of law and its suspension. Riches argues that the critique of law, directed against both Torah and the imperial Lex, should be reduced neither to an antinomian canceling of law nor to a state of exception. Instead, following Taubes’s lead, he describes an alternative account of law compatible with messianic love.

Three substantial reviews conclude this issue. Ulrich Plass surveys five recent and very different contributions to Adorno scholarship. Lynita K. News-wander carefully uncovers structural tensions in Fredric Jameson’s treatment of utopian literature and science fiction. Finally, Michèle C. Cone discusses Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine’s study of the history of Romanian fascist intellectuals.

*Russell A. Berman*

# *Morality and Critical Theory: On the Normative Problem of Frankfurt School Social Criticism*

James Gordon Finlayson

## ***I. The Problem of Normative Foundations: Habermas's Original Criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer***

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Jürgen Habermas writes:

From the beginning, critical theory labored over the difficulty of giving an account of its own normative foundations...<sup>1</sup>

Call this Habermas's *original objection* to the problem of normative foundations. It has been hugely influential both in the interpretation and assessment of Frankfurt School critical theory and in the development of later variants of it. Nowadays it is a truth almost universally acknowledged that any critical social theory in possession of normative aims and aspirations must be in want of "normative foundations" or suffer from a "normative deficit" of some kind. Since Habermas first mooted it, theorists have been queuing up to make essentially the same point, I take it because they think it well-aimed.<sup>2</sup> Still it is puzzling.

1. The passage continues: "since Horkheimer and Adorno made their turn to the critique of instrumental reason early in the 1940s, this problem has become drastically apparent." Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984–87), 1:374.

2. Albrecht Wellmer, "Practical Philosophy and the Theory of Society: On the Problem of the Normative Foundations of a Critical Social Science," in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmayr (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), chs. 5 and 6; Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). Herbert Schnädelbach challenges a view, which he

To begin with, Habermas's objection is highly compressed and its point obscure. What would it be for a critical theory to give an account of its own normative foundations? One way to interpret this is as the thought that what critical theory of society is lacking, and what it requires, is a normative *moral theory*.<sup>3</sup> Axel Honneth, for example, appears to take this view, for he argues that it is with "communicative ethics"—i.e., with a moral theory—that "Habermas . . . has attempted to justify the normative claims of a critical social theory." On Honneth's (widespread) understanding of the problem, Habermas's solution is this: discourse ethics supplies the normative foundations (the normative moral theory) that Habermas's own critical theory lacks and requires. Though widespread, this interpretation of Habermas's work is questionable. It is not obvious that critical social theory requires a normative *moral theory* to justify its conclusions. Besides, even if it did, discourse ethics would not do the job of providing the missing normative foundations, because it is not the kind of normative moral theory that is designed to do the first-order work of determining what moral norms are valid and answering the question of what ought to be done and why. It offers a rational reconstruction of the normative content of modernity that resides in practices of communication and various spheres of discourse, including, among others, moral discourse. However, another interpretation of the *original objection* suggests itself: namely, the thought that what critical theory lacks and needs are *normative (moral) arguments or reasons*. This is the interpretation I favor. But this (correct) view of the problem of normative foundations makes it obvious why discourse ethics cannot be the solution, because a rational reconstruction of morality is not a first-order moral argument or reason (or valid moral norm).

Assuming this view of the problem to be right, Habermas's original objection, or at least his formulation of it, suggests where he understands both problem and solution to lie. The problem lies not with the *normative* aims and conclusions of critical social theory, which are in order, but with the inadequate support for these conclusions. On this view, then, the problem consists in a justification gap in the critical theory of society: it lacks, and should be kitted out with, adequate moral grounds or reasons.

takes to be the prevailing one, that Horkheimer has an "ethics deficit." See Schnädelbach, "Max Horkheimer and the Moral Philosophy of German idealism," in *On Max Horkheimer*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 281.

3. Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 282.



Of course, the justification gap, if that is indeed the problem, can be filled in another way too: critical social theory can modulate its conclusions so that they are supported by whatever grounds it has available. Judging from Habermas's formulation of "the problem of normative foundations," he appears not to consider the possibility that the answer might be to weaken the conclusions rather than to strengthen the grounds.<sup>4</sup>

A second set of difficulties surrounding Habermas's original objection is that he develops it according to the specifications of his own—highly controversial—theories of meaning and communicative action, theories that few even of his most sympathetic followers are prepared to defend.<sup>5</sup> For example, Habermas's original objection runs together two quite different lines of argument. To see what is being run together and why, we need to know what Habermas means by "validity." For Habermas, validity is not a formal logical relation between propositions, but a pragmatic norm for the appraisal of various kinds of discourse. To cut a long story short, a validity claim is a pragmatic presupposition of an utterance (or text) whereby the speaker invites the hearer to accept its content (say, the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) on the basis of reasons that have been or could be given in support of it. A validity claim—or better, a claim *to* validity—can according to Habermas take the form either of a claim to truth or of a claim to what he calls "normative rightness." Habermas maintains that both truth and rightness can be understood as specifications of an underlying generic notion of validity, and that these are not identical but analogous in important respects.<sup>6</sup>

Habermas sets out his objections to Adorno and Horkheimer in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* and again also in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. In the latter, the first and principal

4. Yet, I will argue in section 4 below that this is what he actually does in his own social theory.

5. See Claudia Rademacher, *Versöhnung oder Verständigung? Kritik der Habermaschen Adorno-Revision* (Lüneberg: zu Klampen, 1993). While it may be that Habermas reads other philosophers (not just Adorno) through the optic of his own theory, this does not mean that he has not identified a problem with Adorno's critical theory or that Adorno and Horkheimer can avoid the problem.

6. According to Habermas, truth and rightness are specifications of this norm, and this is supposed to explain why theoretical and moral discourse should have a logically or syntactically similar inferential structure. For the difficulties this lands him in, see J. G. Finlayson, "Habermas's Moral Cognitivism and the Frege-Geach Challenge," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (2005): 319–45.

objection he levels against the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that they fall foul of a “performative contradiction.” On Habermas’s view, the contradiction allegedly exists because, on the one hand, the authors cannot but make a validity claim to truth on behalf of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and thus performatively commit to offer reason and arguments in support of it, while, on the other hand, they are prevented from so doing by the content of the theory, which implies that all rationality (and hence validity) is a disguised form of power or domination. Without going into detail, the nub of Habermas’s objection is that Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not *assertable* and hence not *credible*, and therefore ultimately self-stultifying and incoherent.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the first objection focuses primarily on the validity claim to truth of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the second objection, expounded in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, also concerns its validity claim to normative rightness.<sup>8</sup> This objection to “crypto-normativism” is aimed explicitly at Foucault’s historiography, along with a whole roster of French philosophers influenced by Nietzsche, but implicitly also at Adorno and Horkheimer.<sup>9</sup> The objection is that their respective diagnoses of modernity make a validity claim to normative rightness that they (cannot but) fail to make good.<sup>10</sup>

Habermas may not be guilty of the same normative confusions for which he criticizes his opponents, but he is certainly guilty of at least two

7. What he actually says is that their model of ideology critique is “total” or “totalizing,” but the point is the same. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 126–30. This is similar to the criticism set out in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where he claims that Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of instrumental reason is ensnared in a “paradox”: “The ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ is an ironic affair: It shows the self-critique of reason the way to truth, and at the same time contests the possibility ‘that at this stage of complete alienation the idea of truth is still accessible’.” Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1:383–84.

8. This is not as obvious as it might be because Habermas gathers truth and rightness together under the heading of rationality.

9. For example, Habermas claims that Foucault’s historiography is “crypto-normative” and approvingly cites Nancy Fraser’s charge against the normative confusion of Foucault’s critique of power: “Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could Foucault begin to answer this question. Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it.” Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, p. 284; see also p. 276.

10. But see Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, pp. 111, 113, 119, 122, and 127.

of his own. The first one concerns his notion of “normative rightness” (*normative Richtigkeit*), which is ambiguous between a non-moral meaning—roughly, “justified by the appropriate reasons”—and a specifically moral notion, meaning morally justified.<sup>11</sup> The second one concerns the polysemous term “normative” in phrases like “normative aims,” “normative grounds,” “normative validity,” “normative rightness,” “normative notions,” etc., with which Habermas’s writings are liberally seasoned. At the one extreme, the adjective “normative” is sometimes used exclusively in the context of morality. At the other extreme lie all kinds of non-moral rules: rules of logic, truth (on some accounts), rules of grammar, and rules of discourse, for example. Then there is a whole gamut of notions in between these two poles. By not specifying what kind of *normative* claims or contents are in play (e.g., the claims that Adorno and Horkheimer and Foucault allegedly cannot avoid making, and yet cannot make good), Habermas sows a second lot of confusion, confusion that neither his followers nor his critics have managed to clear up.

We can avoid such confusion by construing the term “normative rightness” as a moral notion, in the broad sense of “morality” specified below, rather than as a type of Habermasian “validity,” i.e., as a norm of correctness below the threshold of morality proper. We thus disentangle Habermas’s objection from the pragmatic theory of meaning and its attendant difficulties, which in turn allows us to separate the objection to the crypto-normativism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* from the objection concerning its (putative) performatively contradictory truth claim. Habermas, because he holds that truth and normative rightness are specifications of a single underlying notion of validity, treats these as two dimensions of the same problem. I think that they are different objections and that the former gets nearer the normative problem of critical theory.<sup>12</sup>

11. My view is that, for the sake of Habermas’s discourse ethics, “normative rightness” had better not be construed as a moral notion since that would render the program of discourse ethics and the derivation of principle (U) viciously circular, and would create difficulties in Habermas’s pragmatic theory of meaning, according to which all regulative speech acts, not just moral utterances, are supposed to make validity claims to “rightness.” Rather “rightness” or “normative rightness” is best understood to mean something like “justified by the appropriate reasons.” For a defense of this interpretation, see Finlayson, “Habermas’s Moral Cognitivism.” The trouble is that Habermas clearly does, at least sometimes, use the term “rightness” in a specifically moral sense.

12. Habermas, by contrast, who holds that truth and normative rightness are specifications of a single underlying notion of validity, treats them as two dimensions of the same problem.

## ***II. The Normative Aims of Critical Theory and the Justification Gap***

No one disputes that critical theory has normative aims. It is relatively easy to state what these aims are, though not so easy to say in what sense they are normative. One thesis that has gained renewed currency in recent times, due to Honneth, is that in order for a social theory to be a *critical* theory it is minimally necessary that it offer a diagnosis of what is wrong with the social world.<sup>13</sup> Honneth's thesis is a promising place to begin.

1. A critical theory of society must at least give an account of what is *wrong* with the social world or show that it is *bad* in some significant way and that it *ought not* to be like it is.

Critical theory's diagnosis of the social world is inherently a normative enterprise, since it involves judgments that the world *ought not* to be as it is, or about what is *wrong* with it. True, numerous other social and political theorists, not just Frankfurt School theorists, offer theories that are *critical* in this minimal diagnostic sense.<sup>14</sup> For instance the Rawlsian tradition of political philosophy is also *critical* in the diagnostic sense. John Rawls famously wrote that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." He asks the question, is the "basic structure of society" just? If the answer is no, this has practical implications because "laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust."<sup>15</sup> This does not impugn Honneth's thesis, for it is not trying to capture what is distinctive about Frankfurt School critical theory, only what is necessary to it. It claims to capture a feature common to all Frankfurt School critical theory, from the work of Horkheimer in the 1930s, through all of Adorno's (and Marcuse's)

13. Honneth has put forward a convincing case for thesis 1 in a variety of different places: Axel Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social: Toward the Present Situation of Social Philosophy," in *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. David M. Rasmussen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 387; Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Charles W. Wright (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), pp. xix–xxiii; Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism," *Constellations* 7 (2000): 122–25; Honneth, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), pp. 49–70.

14. Brian Barry remarked, when I gave a version of this paper at LSE, that, in that case *everyone's a critical theorist*. While this is true, it is not an objection to my account. I'm happy to accept that thesis 1 applies to any normative political and social theory.

15. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), p. 3.

work, right up to and including the work of the so-called second and third generation Frankfurt theorists, Habermas and Honneth.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, critical theory has often aimed at much more than providing a diagnosis of what is wrong with society, and this was especially true of its pre-war varieties. First generation critical theory had remedial as well as diagnostic aims, namely, the radical and wholesale qualitative transformation of society.<sup>17</sup> In my view, interpreters are too quick to level the accusation that Adorno and Horkheimer abandoned the remedial aims of critical theory, and retreated from praxis and from politics. Adorno only retreated from the idea that critical theory could under the (then) current circumstances dispense recipes for concrete institutional and social change. He remained adamant that the task of critical theory was to alter the attitudes and beliefs of individual agents, and to inculcate an ethos of resistance, a kind dialectical philosophical anti-therapy, in anticipation of, and as a necessary prerequisite to, radical social change.<sup>18</sup>

Thesis 1 raises some questions about the status and meaning of the normative terms it uses, so let's address these.

2. The terms "wrong," "bad," and "ought not" in thesis 1 are, broadly speaking, moral terms.

16. Recall that the first generation theorists Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse produced a lot of work, over a long period (from the 1930s to the 1970s) in which their ideas developed considerably. It is not as easy as it might seem to capture a feature that is common to their work, let alone to everything that commonly falls under the term "Frankfurt School critical theory."

17. This is also true of some contemporary social critics. See, for example, Michael Walzer, who writes: "The special role of the critic is to describe what is wrong in ways that suggest a remedy." Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Peter Halban, 1989), p. 10. Note that the remedy is "suggested" by the critic, not directly brought about by him or her.

18. See J. G. Finlayson, "Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable," *European Journal of Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002): 1–25; Finlayson, "Political, Moral and Critical Theory: On the Practical Philosophy of the Frankfurt School," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Michael Rosen and Brian Leiter (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), pp. 626–70; Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); Raymond Geuss, "Dialectics and the Revolutionary Impulse," and Simone Chambers, "The Politics of Critical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 103–39 and 219–48; and Peter Wagner, "Versuch das Endspiel zu verstehen: Kapitalismusanalyse als Gesellschaftstheorie," in *Dialektik der Freiheit: Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003*, ed. Axel Honneth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 205–37.

I use the term “moral” here in the broadest sense to refer to the domain of norms and values that relate to and flow from the deepest and most central questions concerning the life, character, and actions of social agents, and their relations to the lives, character, and actions of others. “Morality” is often used by its detractors and supporters in a much narrower sense to mean a set of rules or principles that tell one what one ought to do and why, usually by establishing negative duties or prohibitions on certain actions. This narrow usage was (I think) invented by Hegel, who used the term *Moralität* as opposed to *Sittlichkeit* to denote the subjectivist conception of ethics that he attributed to Kant, Fichte, and the Stoics, but a similar usage persists in more contemporary writers.<sup>19</sup> In the narrow sense of morality, obligations are characteristically taken to have a special importance, priority over other values, and a peculiar stringency.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, morality in the narrower sense is often contrasted with and held to be distinct from ethics, ethical life, conceptions of the good or the good life, and considerations of virtue and prudence. In the German tradition, another contrast, due to Weber, is sometimes drawn between a *Gesinnungsethik*, or ethics of conviction, and a *Verantwortungsethik*, or ethics of responsibility.<sup>21</sup> Adorno, when he does not make the rather lazy assumption that these two pairs of concepts, *Moralität/Sittlichkeit* and

19. “We say ‘morality’ instead of virtue when it is not my will that has turned into a habit, as it does in virtuous action, that I use to guide my actions; rather morality contains essentially my subjective reflection, my conviction, that what I do conforms with universal rational determination of the will, universal duty.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986), 19:284 (my translation). Among the prominent recent critics of the moral standpoint are G. E. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19; Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), ch. 10, “Morality, the Peculiar Institution,” pp. 174–96; and more recently Raymond Geuss, “Outside Ethics,” in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2005), pp. 40–67.

20. This is also true of most theorists who defend conceptions of the moral standpoint, prominent among whom are Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (New York: Random House, 1965); T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998); and Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

21. Max Weber introduced the distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction) and *Verantwortungsethik* (ethics of responsibility) in his 1919 lectures on “The Profession and Vocation of Politics.” *Gesinnungsethik* refers to a (Kantian and Fichtean) deontological conception of morality, but not only to these, for Weber primarily has Christian conceptions of ethics in mind. The term *Verantwortungsethik* refers to teleological or consequentialist conceptions of action in the domain of the political. The closest English

*Gesinnungsethik/Verantwortungsethik*, are simply equivalent, does not take care to distinguish between them.<sup>22</sup> However, it is natural and useful to use the term “morality” in a broad, inclusive sense, where the moral domain is not restricted to the narrow core of values with their characteristic stringency, importance, and priority (e.g., Hegel’s “Moralität” or Williams’s “morality, the peculiar institution”), but where everything it encompasses relates to these as their center.<sup>23</sup> Although on this broad sense of “morality,” the distinction between the moral and the non-moral is not sharp, moral notions such as “moral goodness,” “moral rightness,” and “moral value” are distinguishable from non-moral notions of value and goodness, such as aesthetic values, economic goods, rules of etiquette, and the like, which are not so tightly connected to the narrow central core.<sup>24</sup>

Thesis 3 follows from theses 1 and 2:

3. Critical theory has, and cannot but have, normative (i.e., broadly moral) diagnostic aims or conclusions.

This is still a controversial claim, and many commentators on critical theory deny it.<sup>25</sup> I find this surprising, for I think it obvious that one cannot do *critical* theory without diagnosing what is *wrong with* the social world, and one cannot do that without making some broadly moral claims,

equivalent to the *Gesinnungsethik/Verantwortungsethik* distinction is therefore that between deontology and consequentialism.

22. For example, see lecture 17 of Adorno’s *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Abt. 4, Bd. 10, ed. Thomas Schröder (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 248–62.

23. My broad view of the moral domain, relating to a narrow core morality and a non-moral periphery, is not dissimilar to that of Scanlon’s in his *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 171–77.

24. From now on the term “moral” will be understood in this broad sense unless indicated otherwise.

25. See for example Guiseppa Tassone, “Amoral Adorno: Negative Dialectics Outside Ethics,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 8, no. 3 (2005): 251–67. Tassone overstates the point—Adorno is clearly not amoral. Raymond Geuss, in “Outside Ethics,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2003): 29–53, claims that Adorno does not appeal to morality in the narrow sense, but tries to position himself outside the standpoint from which it makes sense to ask characteristically (narrow) moral questions, such as “What ought I to do?” or “What is the good life for man?” While this is a plausible story when told about Heidegger and Nietzsche, I think it applies less well to Adorno. The most comprehensive discussion of the various difficulties besetting Adorno’s ethical thought and the different solutions that have been offered to them, is Fabian Freyenhagen, “Adorno’s Negativistic Ethics” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2005).



i.e., that society is “bad,” that it ought not to be as it is, that it should be changed, and so forth. The moral animus of Frankfurt School critical theory is most clearly discernible in Adorno’s writings. Jay Bernstein is right to emphasise this: “No reading of the works of T. W. Adorno can fail to be struck by the ethical intensity of his writing, sentence by sentence, word by word.”<sup>26</sup> Even though Adorno uses the not obviously moral vocabulary of “false” and “untrue” to describe existing society, in place of the more familiar moral terms “wrong,” “impermissible,” “bad,” and so forth, he nonetheless makes the broadly moral judgments that the social world is not as it *ought to be* and *should be* changed. Horkheimer and Adorno make the rather bold normative statements that the social world is “evil” (*böse*), “bad” (*schlecht*), “the bad” (*das Schlechte*), “absolute evil,” and “radically evil.”<sup>27</sup>

The textual evidence that first generation critical theorists appear to make broadly moral claims is incontrovertible. Here are two examples among many:

In the condition of their unfreedom, Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative on human beings, namely: to order their thought and actions such that Auschwitz never reoccur, nothing similar ever happen.<sup>28</sup>

The only thing that can perhaps be said is, that the correct life [*das richtige Leben*] today would consist in the shape of resistance against the forms of a false life [*eines falschen Lebens*], which has been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds.<sup>29</sup>

If they did not have broadly moral weight, passages such as these would be far more anodyne than they in fact are, and it is hard to interpret them other than as broadly speaking moral claims. While it might run against

26. J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 1.

27. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. 168. See also Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 62. I prefer to give these terms a secular, broadly moral, not a theological interpretation.

28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 365. See also Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), pp. 90–91, 202–3. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 116.

29. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, p. 249.



the grain to say that these are *central claims* or *key concepts* of Adorno's work, for he likes to claim that in philosophical texts all propositions stand equally close to the center, in the context of the present discussion they are the most significant ones.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth thesis take us into different and disputed philosophical territory:

4. Social theories with normative (broadly moral) aims or conclusions require broadly moral grounds or justifications.

Virtually all critics and commentators accept that normative conclusions require normative grounds or premises, presumably because they all accept what is sometimes called "Hume's law," that one cannot validly infer any genuine use of moral "ought" from any set of merely descriptive premises, i.e., from premises that do not already contain any genuine moral "oughts." There is a lot to be said on the status of Hume's law and on its relevance to the issue of the justification gap in critical theory, and I can only adumbrate a couple of the difficulties here.<sup>31</sup>

30. On philosophical style, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), pp. 70–74, 80–85; and Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes on Literature*, 2 vols., trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 1:3–24. In Marcuse we can find a more explicit admission that Frankfurt School theory cannot but make broadly moral claims: "[T]he judgment that human life is worth living, or rather can and ought to be made worth living, . . . is the a priori of social theory." Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. xlii. The nice thing about Marcuse is that he sometimes just comes straight out and says the things that Adorno and Horkheimer think but, consistent with their convictions about philosophical style, couch in much more recondite language.

31. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 27. It is not entirely clear how Hume's law should be interpreted or whether it is true. Certainly it should be handled carefully and kept apart from the various issues surrounding the distinction between facts and values and from the debate over Moore's "naturalistic fallacy." See Hilary Putnam, *Reason Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), chs. 6 and 9. As is well known, the latter is not a fallacy, nor does Moore provide an argument against naturalism. At best he provides a challenge to reductionism about the good. See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1903). For a discussion of the contemporary significance of Moore's open question "argument," see *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches*, ed. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), pp. 3–7. Albrecht Wellmer conflates Hume's law with the naturalistic fallacy in his "Practical Philosophy and the Theory of Society: On the Normative Foundations of

First, Hume's law might be supposed to represent a deep fact about the relation of the moral to the non-moral, rather than a general but trivial consequence of the conservatism of logic. If so, it cannot be assumed to be a priori and cannot settle in advance the question of whether considerations that are not already moral can yield conclusions that are. Over the years numerous counterexamples to Hume's law have been proposed, examples of apparently impeccable inferences where a moral "ought" appears to follow from a non-moral premise.<sup>32</sup> So it might be claimed that thesis 4 begs an important question against the critical theorist. The question is not one in which (though much discussed in other philosophical circles at the time) Adorno and Horkheimer show any interest. They are not interested in whether a valid deduction from merely descriptive premises to normative conclusions can be made. If anything, they reject what they see as the presuppositions of Hume's law, since they deny, on Hegelian grounds, that there can be a sharp distinction between "is" and "ought," between descriptive and normative, just as they reject any hard and fast semantic and metaphysical distinctions between facts and values, distinctions that they associate with neo-Kantianism and positivism, toward which they are unfailingly hostile.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, they do not think that anything interesting can be shown by logical *deduction*, and they certainly do not think of their own arguments like that.<sup>34</sup>

Adorno and Horkheimer's suspicions notwithstanding, Hume's law remains at the very least a conjecture with strong appeal, one that has stood up well to all the counterexamples, and the important question is whether

a Critical Social Science," in Benhabib and Dallmayr, eds., *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, p. 295.

32. For example, G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Brute Facts," *Analysis* 8, no. 3 (1958): 69–72; J. R. Searle, "How to Derive an 'Ought' from an 'Is,'" in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964), pp. 101–15; Arthur N. Prior, "The Autonomy of Ethics," *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 38 (1960): 199–206.

33. Horkheimer calls Hume "the Father of modern positivism" for having eliminated objective reason. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York, Continuum, 1974), p. 18. Adorno's rejection of the "is"/"ought" distinction is so deep in his thinking that it infuses his entire philosophy. There is nothing he is more keen to expose as an illusion than the category of mere being—or the concomitant idea of what is merely descriptive. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 161: "What is, is more than it is." Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), p. 151: "what *ought* to be also is, and what only *ought* to be, without actually being, has no truth." Note that my use of the broad concept of morality is not at odds with these views.

34. For example, see Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 80.

it, or some version of it, applies to their theories, not whether they would be minded to accept it. It seems to me that it does apply, inasmuch as they would not and should not want to deny either that their social theory has broadly moral weight or that its conclusions are justified (in some suitable sense of justification).<sup>35</sup> The “Hegelian” insight that the descriptive and the normative are not in every case neatly separable, or that there is no sharp distinction between facts and norms, is not the point. The point is that there is no valid inference to conclusions that have broadly moral weight from premises that do not.

The second difficulty with thesis 4 is this. Some people can be misled by certain passages, such as the following one from *Negative Dialectics*, into thinking that Adorno takes the basic norms or principles of morality to be self-evident:<sup>36</sup>

One ought not to torture: there ought to be no concentration camps . . . . These sentences are only true as impulses, when it is reported that somewhere torture is taking place. They should not be rationalized. As abstract principles they lapse into the bad infinity of their derivation and validity.<sup>37</sup>

True, Adorno always had a certain (possibly misplaced) confidence in the liberating power of rebellious impulses, one that was shared by his contemporaries Eric Fromm, Wilhelm Reich, and Herbert Marcuse, among others; true, he did attempt to redress the imbalance that he thought philosophy in particular, and civilization in general, had established between the reflective and the somatic; true, he insisted that we can reliably know

35. Honneth teeters on the brink of denying this last point. But in the end he seems only to hold out for the uncontentious point that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* achieves its effect by “showing up hitherto unperceived” meanings and evaluative features of social reality, rather than through “argumentative justifications.” Honneth, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society,” p. 123. While this may be so, the perception of an evaluative feature of social reality is, of course, itself a kind of broadly moral evidence that plays a role in explanatory and suasive justification. So, with this concession, Honneth smudges the distinction he attempts to draw between what he calls “disclosing criticism” and “argumentative justification.”

36. Berndt Ladwig raised this objection—namely, that Adorno took moral principles to be self-evident—when I gave a version of this paper to the *Colloquium on Philosophy and the Social Sciences* at the Villa Lana, in May 2006.

37. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 286. See also Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” in *Critical Models*, p. 202.



them. To seek reassurance in rationality, to ask for rational justifications for our deepest moral convictions, is pointless because that kind of reassurance will only tend to weaken and undermine them.<sup>40</sup> Such considerations may be what lay behind Adorno and Horkheimer's remark that Sade and Nietzsche showed "[t]he impossibility of deriving from reason any principled argument against murder."<sup>41</sup>

Similar considerations have led some Adorno scholars in recent times to construe the conclusions of his social theory as "material inferences."<sup>42</sup> On this view, arguments like the above— $\phi$ -ing causes needless suffering; therefore one ought not to  $\phi$ —are fine as they stand with no suppressed premises. The practical conclusions of Adorno's texts are evinced by the semantic content of the concepts rather than by the underlying logical form of the argument. I do not have a view about the net benefits of reading Adorno's texts in this way, through the optic of Wilfred Sellars and Robert Brandom, though it looks more fruitful and plausible than attributing to Adorno the idea that moral principles are self-evident. The point I wish to emphasize is that, read in this way, Adorno's philosophy does not claim that social theory *can and must do without any broadly moral grounds or justifications*. It is only a certain kind of (logical) deductive justification that it must do without, namely, the kind of justification Adorno thinks is contained in these theorems or in a Kantian test of universalizability of maxims.<sup>43</sup> Some moral justifications (where morality is broadly construed and justification does not just mean deduction) are perfectly in order.

40. J. L. Austin makes a similar point against A. J. Ayer and G. J. Warnock. Why should I think that my statements, such as, for example, "That is a pig" or "I live in Oxford," stand in need of further verification, when I am in the best possible position to know that that is a pig, since I am standing in front of a pig and can see it, or that I live in Oxford, since I live in Oxford and know this. If I did assume that statements such as these stand in need for verification, then I would mistakenly embark on an inevitably forlorn quest for evidence and foundations of knowledge, which might well lead me to be less confident about believing things I have no good reason to doubt. J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 104.

41. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 119. Admittedly this point applies better to the deep deontological prohibitions against murder and torture than, for example, to questions about the justice of the basic structure of society.

42. J. M. Bernstein, "Mimetic Rationality and Material Inference," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 63, no. 22 (2004): 7–24. Ståle Finke, "Concepts and Intuitions: Adorno after the Linguistic Turn," *Inquiry* 44, no. 2 (2001): 171–200.

43. Most Rawlsian social criticism is of just the kind that Adorno and Horkheimer reject. (1) If  $x$  is  $F$ , (where  $F$  = violates the principles of justice), then  $x$  is unjust and must be reformed. (2) But  $a$  is  $F$ . (3) Therefore  $a$  is unjust and must be reformed.

Adorno can and does hold that the fact that your actions are causing or furthering human suffering is, *ceteris paribus*, good reason to cease doing them, and maintains generally that critical theory answers to the normative reality of the social world.<sup>44</sup> These views are entirely consistent with Hume's law and with the idea that critical theory is normative all the way through, i.e., that it has normative (broadly moral) grounds and normative (broadly moral) conclusions. This shows that the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists do, and indeed better had, hold thesis 4.

I have shown that the first generation of critical theorists are committed to these four theses and that there are independent reasons for holding them to be true. Together they form an argument that can be brought to bear on Adorno and Horkheimer's critical social theory:

1. A critical theory of society must at least give an account of what is "wrong" with the social world, or show that it is in some way "bad" or that it "ought not" to be like it is.
2. The terms "wrong," "bad," and "ought not" in thesis 1 are, broadly speaking, moral terms.
3. Critical theory has, and cannot but have, broadly moral aims or conclusions.
4. Social theories with broadly moral aims or conclusions require broadly moral grounds or justifications.

Therefore, if a critical theory does not have broadly moral grounds, its normative conclusions are unwarranted.

This argument neatly captures the point of Habermas's original objection and relies on no controversial assumptions drawn from his theory of communicative action. It points to a justification gap in critical theory: first generation critical theory offers no broadly moral grounds for its conclusions, so these remain unsupported.<sup>45</sup>

44. "It [theory] does not have answers to everything, but responds to a world that is false to its innermost core." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 31.

45. This argument does not require that there is (or that there is not) any sharp distinction between morality and ethics, such as the one that Habermas draws. This is a good thing in two respects: first, because the sharp distinction that Habermas draws is problematic,

### ***III. The Normative Problem of Frankfurt School Critical Theory***

If this is all that the problem of normative foundations amounts to, it is neither a deep or interesting problem, nor one specific to Frankfurt School critical theory. Any theory that lacks appropriate justification or grounds has that problem; any social theory with broadly moral conclusions that lacks broadly moral premises has a justification gap. However, the problem deepens and becomes more interesting when we add a fifth thesis. It also begins to reflect what is distinctive (and distinctively problematic) about Frankfurt School critical social theory.

5. Critical theory does not, and in some respects had better not, avail itself of any broadly moral standard (be this a conception of good, bad, right, or wrong).

If it can be shown that thesis 5 is correct, then it appears critical theory faces a dilemma.

6. Either it relies on broadly moral premises (or broadly moral considerations) and is therefore self-contradictory, or it does not, in which case its conclusions are unsupported.

This is not the same as the objection to the justification gap. We noted earlier that, in principle, that problem could be solved in one of two ways: either by weakening the conclusions until they are adequately supported by the available premises or by strengthening the moral premises. Since, however, thesis 3 implies that any social theory that attempts to reduce the justification gap by weakening its conclusions would cease to be a *critical* theory (and would be more of a descriptive social theory), it appears that the only solution open to the critical theorist is to supply normative grounds (broadly moral reasons) for those conclusions. Once we accept thesis 5, that strategy is blocked: neither of the alternatives—strengthening the normative premises or weakening the normative conclusions—can be embraced. This is the paradox of the conception of critical theory expressed in the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and we do not need Habermas's notion of a performative contradiction to grasp it.

Thesis 5 is pivotal. To establish it, we need to motivate the claims that first generation critical theorists in fact do not base their criticisms on

and, second, because his original objection predates that distinction anyway, which he first makes in *Erläuterungen zu Diskursethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).



broadly moral premises, and indeed have good reason not to do so.<sup>46</sup> There are a several different sets reasons to take into consideration here:

(1) The first set of reasons has to do with the actual historical experiences that shaped the subsequent outlook of Horkheimer, Adorno, and their contemporaries. Having lived through the collapse of the Weimar Republic, witnessed the rise of the Third Reich, and experienced the traumatic aftermath of the war, Adorno and Horkheimer, like many Germans, came to reassess the whole culture with which they had hitherto so strongly identified. An entire culture, they concluded, had completely failed:

If one wanted to draw up an ontology that accorded with the fundamental way things are, the repetition of which makes it invariant, then it would be the horror. An ontology of culture would certainly have to include what it was about culture that completely failed.<sup>47</sup>

In their view, morality, as part of that culture, had also failed: it failed to provide the basis of any serious resistance to fascism and totalitarianism. Adorno makes this point in his 1963 lectures on the *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, where he indicates that the deep question that occupies him, one that in his view Kant's individualist ethics obscures, is whether "culture, and what this so-called culture has become, leaves anything even resembling right living [*richtiges Leben*], or whether it is a context of institutions, which to an increasing degree actually hinders such a thing as the right life."<sup>48</sup> In these lectures Adorno argues that *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, which he understands not just as two competing theories of morality but also as two *actually existing* moralities, failed each its own way.

46. Though I advance a claim about first generation critical theorists in general, I think Marcuse is a possible exception. See note 30 above.

47. This is the nub of one of Adorno's many criticisms of Heidegger. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 122. See also Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 49. Adorno's views on the failure of German culture bear interesting comparison with those of Viktor Klemperer, also an academic and also of Jewish origin, who gives a most vivid and fascinating account of his experience of the failure of German culture. Klemperer, Professor of Languages and Literature at the Dresden Technical University, was an academic of an entirely different cast of mind to the Frankfurt School theorists, since he began as a conservative German nationalist. He was unfortunate enough not to have gone into exile, but to have lived through and survived the period of National Socialist rule. See Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Viktor Klemperer, 1933-41*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Phoenix, 1998).

48. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, p. 28.



Adorno tells a story (familiar at least from Hegel onward) about the relation between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, according to which morality emerges with the onset of modernity and its quest for rational reassurance, once the “unquestioned and self-evident pregiveness of ethical norms” has begun to be eroded.<sup>49</sup> On his view, once the seed of rational reflection has begun to germinate and the “critical labor of the concept” has flown from the substantial ethical life of the community, the latter ceases to be merely a relic of something “ancient, good, and true” and hardens into something “poisoned and evil.”

One can actually say that the horror perpetrated by fascism, is to a great extent nothing but an extension of traditional ethics [*Volksitten*], which has turned into something irrational and violent precisely because it has been divorced from reason.<sup>50</sup>

It is not just that culture, tradition, and ethics failed to provide an effective basis for resistance to Nazism, but rather that they provided the very soil in which it germinated. In *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno makes clear that, under current conditions, *Sittlichkeit*, ethical life or the morality of custom, rather than *Moralität*, the morality of conviction or principle, presents the immediate danger.<sup>51</sup> The former, with its pressure toward group adaptation and conformity, is far less likely to be a source of possible resistance and criticism and more likely to harden into totalitarianism than the latter.<sup>52</sup>

So, Adorno’s particular horror of anything that smacked of custom, folk, or tradition was more than the prejudice of an urbane sophisticate; it followed from his deep animus against reconciliation, against “being at home” in the social world, which underlies his of ethics of resistance.<sup>53</sup> As

49. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

51. See Adorno’s interpretation of Ibsen’s *Wild Duck* in lecture 16: “In consequence, what the ethics of responsibility amounts to is that existing reality—or what Hegel calls the way of the world [*der Weltlauf*], which he defends against the vanity of protesting interiority—is always in the right over against the human subject.” Theodor W. Adorno, *The Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 165.

52. This presents an insuperable obstacle for communitarian readings of Adorno who would reinterpret his work as a communitarian critique of Rawls and Kantianism.

53. I have argued in several places, since at least 2000, that Adorno has a normative ethics of resistance. See, for example, Finlayson, “Adorno on the Ethical and the Inef-

he wrote in *Minima Moralia*: “Today . . . it is part of morality not to be at home with oneself.” Present social conditions call for a detached, uncommitted living of one’s private life.<sup>54</sup>

(2) Second, the philosophical commitments of Hegelian Marxism militate against Adorno and Horkheimer’s adducing broadly moral grounds. All the first generation Frankfurt School thinkers subscribe both to Hegel’s criticism of *Moralität* and to Marx’s exposure of bourgeois morality as the ideology of the property-owning middle-class.<sup>55</sup> Hegel leveled some now-familiar objections to “the moral standpoint”: he accused Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative of being empty, and criticized “morality” for being a formal, merely external, and thus coercive imposition of reason on sensibility. All the critical theorists can be found making the same points.<sup>56</sup> In *The German Ideology* and elsewhere, Marx claimed that morality and its characteristic notions—duty, obligation, and free will—are merely ideological illusions of the German middle classes, which illusions, while cloaked in the guise of universality, in fact secretly express and advance the particular interests of that class.<sup>57</sup> Horkheimer

able.” This view is now rapidly gaining currency. See, for example, Bert van den Brink, “Damaged Life: Power and Recognition in Adorno’s Ethics,” in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Theory*, ed. Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 84; and Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 197.

54. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39. The German phrase “nicht bei sich selber zu Hause zu sein” contains a reference to Hegel. “The ‘I’ is as at home in the world, when he knows it; even more when he has understood it.” Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 35–36.

55. This raises the tricky question of whether these two criticisms of morality are consistent. I think they are in tension with one another, but that is a topic for another occasion.

56. The following notorious sentence by Adorno and Horkheimer is in essence a very vivid version of the empty formalism objection: “The impossibility of deriving from reason any principled argument against murder: Not to have suppressed this, but to have proclaimed it far and wide, is what incited the hatred with which progressives now pursue Sade and Nietzsche.” Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 118. See also Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*; Habermas, *Erläuterung zur Diskursethik*, pp. 9–31; and Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 11, 22, and passim. They all endorse Hegel’s criticism of the moral standpoint.

57. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 97. In point of fact, Marx has a much more ambivalent relation to morality than his remarks in *The German Ideology* and elsewhere give to believe. There is a tension throughout his early work between his allergic rejection of moral arguments, and the broadly moral character of his own social criticism. The young Marx, without blushing,

and Adorno are in broad agreement. Even though Marx's critique targets morality narrowly construed, the same point applies *ceteris paribus* to the broad domain of the moral.

(3) Consider, thirdly, the Frankfurt School theorists' interpretation and assessment of bourgeois morality and its social function, a critique of the coercive and repressive nature of Kantian *morality*, which they inherited from Schiller, Hegel, and Marx, and then enriched and deepened with insights from Freud.<sup>58</sup> On their view a Kantian morality of principles (or *Gesinnungsethik*) tended to supplant and to corrode the subject's deep underlying affective emotional ties to other people and things, and to foster coldness and indifference in their place, giving rise to an attitude of obedience to and identification with authority.<sup>59</sup> Psychoanalysis unlocked the key to what they considered to be the ideological function of morality: namely, reason's ability to repress and to modify the drives and instincts of social agents and thereby to ensure compliance with social norms. As Adorno put it:

Without psychology, in which the objective constraints are continually internalized anew, it would be impossible to understand how people passively accept a state of unchanging destructive irrationality and, moreover, how they integrate themselves into movements that stand in rather obvious contradiction to their own interests.<sup>60</sup>

invoked his own categorical imperative: "to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, neglected, and contemptible being." It is arguable, furthermore, that the late Marx, for all his emphasis on the "scientific" credentials of the mode of exposition in *Capital*, trades implicitly on a normative conception of justice. See his "Introduction" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 251.

58. Again one must bear in mind that this was not only an attack on Kantianism as a position in moral philosophy (as is the case with many latter-day moral philosophers) but also an attack on Kantianism insofar as it represented the actually existing morality of the bourgeois era.

59. See for example, Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 81–120. See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 221–23, 260–61, and 270–74, especially the section "Reason, Ego, Superego": "Critique of the super-ego has to become a critique of the society that produced it: if criticism goes silent in the face of it, it kow-tows to the ruling social norm" (p. 274).

60. Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 271. One can see how a theory that links emancipation to the rebellious instincts and drives might complement this analysis of the repressive role of pure reason.

That said, the story that Adorno tells about *Moralität* is not entirely negative. His general view is that neither morality nor ethical life is viable under present historical and social conditions. Occasionally, however, mainly in his unpublished lectures, he singles out Kant's moral law for especial praise, because of its infinity and sublimity, which (in his eyes) make it incompatible with any existing form of totalitarianism.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, it is obvious that Frankfurt School critical theory, as a criticism of morality and its social function, is different in kind from any criticism of society that is based on moral principles or broadly moral criteria.

We have shown that and why Adorno and Horkheimer held that social theory cannot appeal either to ethical life or to morality, either to an ethics of conviction or to an ethics of responsibility. It is important to note that in their view these exhausted the moral resources available to the social critic. If neither ethical life and the endemic values and conceptions of a good of an ethical community, nor a morality of principle—either in secular or religious form—is available, then there are no other broadly moral considerations to which they can appeal.<sup>62</sup>

61. "In this sense . . . Kantian moral philosophy, in spite of its much vaunted formalism, which implies that it has nothing to do with any determinate moral code, is incompatible with the figure of totalitarian morality, a morality which turns the rather playful principle that the means justifies the end into the deadly serious one, that is with the total totalitarian reversal of morality." Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, p. 214 (my translation). See also chs. 15, 16, and 17. In this Adorno follows a line of thought similar to one suggested by Marcuse in 1937: "Critical theory . . . unlike philosophy . . . always derives its goals only from present tendencies of the social process. Therefore it has no fear of the utopia that the new order is denounced as being. When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it always appears to the latter as mere utopia. This transcendence speaks not against, but for its truth." Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 64.

62. This is an inference *ex silencio*. If they thought there were another available source of moral normativity on which their social theory could draw, they would surely have mentioned it. It is true that Horkheimer in his early work appeals to the moral sentiments of love, compassion, and solidarity, but he refuses to give these a narrowly "moral" interpretation. Rather, he regards them as the shards of a shattered harmonious *rational* society. In his postwar work, the appeal to rational society, like the appeal to a notion of ethical life, is blocked for the reasons just given. See Max Horkheimer, "Materialismus und Metaphysik" and "Materialismus und Moral," in *Kritische Theorie: eine Dokumentation*, Bd. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: S Fischer Verlag GmbH., 1968), pp. 31–67, 71–110. As for Adorno, he writes that if pressed he would reluctantly say that the only cardinal virtue left standing is that of modesty. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, p. 251. It is

(4) As a consequence of these various worries about *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, Adorno developed a distinctive negative philosophy that not only eschewed but barred any recourse to broadly moral standards. This way of thinking is encapsulated in the concluding sentence of section 18, of *Minima Moralia*, which forms the theme of his 1963 lectures, namely, that there is no right living in the false (life): “Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen.” The best translation of this crucial sentence into English is something like: “The false life cannot be truly lived.”<sup>63</sup> This thesis motivates Adorno’s (and Horkheimer’s) negative utopianism: the view that we can have no positive conception of the good, and that what they call variously “reconciliation,” “redemption,” “happiness,” and “utopia” cannot even be thought. They associated this negative utopianism with the Jewish ban on graven images, but in Adorno the motivation for it is rooted in his critique of identity thinking.<sup>64</sup> Prima facie, these ideas imply that no moral standard of goodness or rightness is available as a basis for criticism, and so anyone who believes this must accept thesis 5.

So far I have adduced reasons why Adorno and Horkheimer, given their experiences and philosophical views, refrain from basing their

difficult to know how to place this virtue in the light of his rejection of both morality and ethical life.

63. This thesis of *Minima Moralia* is difficult to interpret. Jephcott’s translation of this sentence—“Wrong life cannot be lived rightly”—makes it look as if Adorno is using the moral concepts “right” and “wrong,” whereas, in fact, he deliberately eschews such vocabulary and deploys the terms “richtig” and “falsch” (right/false, correct/incorrect). In a similar vein, Adorno’s dedication opens with a remark about an age-old philosophical topic that has fallen into neglect: “die Lehre vom richtigen Leben,” which Jephcott again translates as “the good life.” Jephcott’s subtle moralization of the text has led commentators to ignore the significance of Adorno’s vocabulary.

64. E.g., “The materialist longing to conceive the thing, wants the opposite: the complete object is to be thought only in the absence of images. Such an absence converges with the theological ban on graven images. Materialism secularises it, by not permitting utopia to be pictured positively; that is the content of its negativity.” Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 207. It is hard to say in brief what identity thinking is. The best way to think of it is as the cognitive component of the anthropological drive to master and dominate nature. In Adorno’s view, identity thinking rigidifies and stabilizes meaning, thus making the world more predictable and susceptible to control. Identity thinking can be either narrowly or widely construed. In the first case, it is equivalent with taxonomic or schematic modes of thinking, or associated with some kind of scientific reductionism. In the second case, it is equivalent with conceptual thought as such. I subscribe to the view that Adorno holds all conceptual thought to be identity thinking. Otherwise he would not associate non-identity thinking—say, thinking in constellations—with the difficult labor of thought thinking against itself.

critical theory on broadly moral criteria. Two final considerations lend some independent support to the view that they should not.

(5) One reason why Adorno and Horkheimer avoid basing social criticism on moral considerations is that many central moral concepts do not apply in the first instance to social structure or entities, or at least they do not apply to collective entities such as societies and communities as a whole in the same way that (and as nicely as) they apply to individuals.<sup>65</sup> Why is this? Critical theorists Adorno, Horkheimer, and later Habermas have a sociologically and anthropologically informed conception of morality, according to which morality is a practice that functions as a way of increasing general compliance with social norms (and or values). Human beings hold one another accountable for their actions, through the moral judgment, criticism, and blaming of the wrongdoer, by punishing transgressions or deviations from rules. Compliance arises because appropriately socialized moral agents are averse to the sting of compunction and to the blame and disapproval of others, and therefore tend to modify their behavior in order to avoid experiencing the blame and disapproval of others and their own bad feelings, such as remorse, guilt, etc.<sup>66</sup> This compliance to moral norms is socially beneficial since it generates stability and renders the actions of social agents predictable, thus minimizing conflict that is costly to individuals and corrosive of social order. If something like this view of the social function of morality is right, then moral judgments of the type “x is wrong,” “x is impermissible,” and “x is bad or immoral” will simply not have the same force or effect when leveled, say, against the basic structure of society or against institutions, laws, or economic arrangements.<sup>67</sup>

It is no implication of this view that there is nothing to be gained by condemning the institution of slavery as wicked or apartheid law as

65. Cf. Walzer, who adduces some historical examples of moral criticisms that are apparently directed at and applicable to the social order (not the individuals within it). Walzer, *The Company of Critics*, p. 5.

66. Note that the claim is not that morality only involves the attribution of blame, just that this is an essential part of what we understand broadly as morality.

67. I am not claiming that this is the case with all broadly moral predicates. For example, it is not the case with the predicate “just/unjust,” which nowadays (unlike for Plato and Aristotle) applies more readily to laws, institutions, or procedures and their outcomes, than to persons. I agree with Rawls that justice is “the first virtue of social institutions” and indeed that it is primarily a political virtue. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 3; and Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005).

degrading and immoral. Typically, moral language is very good at engaging the motivations of appropriately socialized moral agents. In many cases, though, it turns out that such criticism is elliptical for criticism of the agents who were the architects of these institutions, or for those who maintained and supported them. Where an impersonal social structure (for example, the capitalist market economy) has a lamentable effect (for example, the immiseration of a class of workers), which arises due to the unforeseen consequences of the combined actions of a plurality of discrete agents, it is obvious why first order moral condemnation of this structure is not apt. Only actions (and omissions) for which agents can appropriately be held responsible are open to such criticism, and such criticism is thus properly directed only at responsible moral agents. On the macro-level (the level of social or collective entities), agency and responsibility are much more difficult to determine for a whole host of metaphysical and epistemological reasons. This is true of companies, corporations, and states, and even more so of diffuse institutions such as markets.

This fact about the social function of morality helps explain why Frankfurt School social theory eschews moral criticism. Instead critical theory draws on a variety of different disciplines—sociology, psychoanalysis, and anthropology—in order to explain why under certain conditions, morality fails, why it ceases to fulfill its primary social function, and why moral motivations are not up to preventing widespread violations of moral norms. In this sense, the *criticism of morality* undertaken by the Frankfurt School is closer in spirit to functional social explanation than it is to the *moral criticism of society* envisaged by Rawls or Michael Walzer.

(6) The final reason why social theory did well to eschew moral criticism is one to which first generation theorists, unlike Habermas and Honneth, paid scant attention. It is what Rawls calls “the fact of reasonable pluralism” and is more loosely called “value pluralism” or “cultural pluralism.”<sup>68</sup> Faced with this fact about modern life, basing critical theory of society on morality inevitably drags it into the mire of controversy and contestation. Under conditions of pluralism, “thin” universal moral principles no less than the “thick” ethical ideals of perfectionism can appear

68. Rawls speaks of “reasonable pluralism” because there is a plurality of “reasonable comprehensive doctrines,” roughly, conceptions of the good or worldviews that are internally consistent and capable of supporting a viable morality and just institutions. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 24, 152.



as no more than the ingrained cultural or ethno-centric prejudices of a particular community.<sup>69</sup> Hence it is better to avoid morally based social criticism.

We have just seen why the Frankfurt School critical theorists did not count out the normative weight of their diagnosis of society in broadly moral terms, and that thesis 5 should be accepted. This gives rise to what I have presented as the paradox of critical theory. Earlier we noted that Honneth's thesis (thesis 1), which stated the minimally necessary condition that any *critical* theory worth the name must meet, was too weak to capture anything specific about Frankfurt School social criticism. Now we have made a start in this direction. One marked difference between Frankfurt School critical theory and the various strands of Anglo-American social philosophy is that the former eschews rational (i.e., deductive) justification of its normative aims and conclusions. A second, more crucial difference is that, while the latter situates itself squarely within the domain of normative moral and political philosophy, the former does not.<sup>70</sup> Rawls's demand that institutions must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust is a *moral* one. Social justice, construed à la Rawls, as a principle of fairness pertaining to the distribution of social goods, is a broadly moral value.<sup>71</sup> Rawls's various opponents virtually all consider

69. Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society," p. 122.

70. "Social philosophy can conveniently be regarded as a subject lying on the borderline between moral philosophy (ethics) and political philosophy." Thomas McPherson, *Social Philosophy* (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), p. 130. See also Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973).

71. This is undoubtedly true of *A Theory of Justice*. In "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," Rawls allows both that the construct—namely, the principles of justice—is a moral conception, and that some of the materials out of which the construct is constructed—namely, the conception of the person—are moral conceptions. John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 9 (1980): 515–72. Rawls's later work presents more of a problem, for there he argues that notion of justice as fairness is "political not metaphysical" and that it is not and does not presuppose a "comprehensive doctrine" such as a moral doctrine or a conception of the good. However, he makes it abundantly clear that the political conception of justice is a still a "moral" conception, in the sense that it is based on values, which have a certain priority and importance, and can be pursued for their own sakes. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 89. It is just that these values also happen to form part of an overlapping consensus, and thus can be part of any comprehensive doctrine. "In saying that a conception is moral, I mean, among other things, that its content is given by certain ideals, principles and standards; and that these norms articulate values, in this case political values" (ibid., p. 11n11). Hence,



social criticism and political philosophy to be a broadly moral discipline. They might appeal, in contrast to Rawlsians, to “thick” conceptions of the good, to the notion of ethical life, to the substantive values of a community or something similar. Yet all such approaches are broadly moral.<sup>72</sup> So we can group Rawls and all of his opponents together on the grounds that their kind of social criticism is, whatever normative sources it appeals to, broadly moral all the way through. By contrast the distinctive feature of first generation Frankfurt School critical theory is its reluctance to base social criticism on broadly moral premises.

More importantly, though, it gives rise to the distinctive normative problem of first generation Frankfurt School critical theory, because it generates the paradox of critical theory: critical theory disavows broadly moral arguments, on the one hand, yet helps itself, on the other hand, to conclusions with moral and ethical weight. Neither solution—weakening the normative conclusions or strengthening the normative premises—is available. If critical theory embraces broadly moral grounds, it is inconsistent, for its distinctive approach is to eschew morality as a basis for criticism. If it does not, its conclusions are unsupported.<sup>73</sup> If it weakens its normative conclusions, it ceases to be a *critical* theory.

Is this a genuine dilemma? Does it matter, for example, if a critical theory of society embraces broadly moral grounds on pain of inconsistency? Horkheimer repudiated what he called “traditional theory” (a term with wide application but which included all formal and deductive reasoning), and Adorno likewise rejected any kind of deductive reasoning as incipient ideology or mere tautology.<sup>74</sup> It is also true that the authors concede in the

Rawls’s claims that they are part of a moral conception tailored to a specific political context—namely, for “political, social and economic institutions” (ibid., p. 11).

72. For example, Walzer maintains that social criticism should not be detached, impartial, and disinterested but connected, impassioned, internal, but for all that no less “a matter of ethical imperatives.” Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987), p. 51; and Walzer, *The Company of Critics*.

73. In what is admittedly just a sideswipe at critical theory, Ernst Tugendhat comes close to formulating the problem under consideration here. In his view the moral ambivalence of Adorno and Horkheimer’s critical theory is evidence of a deep “conceptual confusion” in their thinking. Tugendhat, *Vorlesungen über Ethik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 16.

74. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 70, 80. Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory*, p. 213.

preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that their whole approach to social theory is aporetic. Is this not an admission of a kind of inconsistency?

A careful look at the passage is in order.

The *aporia* that faced us in this work proved to be thus the first object we had to study: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubts—and herein lies our *petitio principii*—that social freedom is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. However, we believe, we have just as clearly discovered that the concept of this very way of thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms—the social institutions—in which it is interwoven, already contains the germ of the regression that today is everywhere manifest.<sup>75</sup>

The *aporia* to which they refer here is the fact that enlightenment, instead of leading to a world of freedom and happiness, has brought about a state of unhappiness and unfreedom. This *aporia* is a real historical phenomenon. While they do not actually claim that *their* thesis is aporetic, it is germane to their dialectical conception of theory that the object of study is not something separate from the theoretical approach to it. The real *aporia* of enlightenment is thus reflected in the chiasmic structure of the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—myth becomes enlightenment, enlightenment reverts to myth—and in the fragmentary structure and aphoristic style of the book.<sup>76</sup> All this is undeniable. Still it does not follow that the theory of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* contradicts itself, and the authors do not concede that it does.

The authors do, by contrast, admit to a *petitio principii*: they concede that their argument is circular. The conclusion they do not argue for (or, which amounts to the same thing, which they conceal as a premise) is that social freedom, and by extension critical theory, is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. There is a direct parallel here with the normative problem, and the passage indicates which side of the dilemma they least welcome. They admit that their conclusions are unsupported; they do not admit that their argument is inconsistent or incoherent. If their theory were incoherent, it would be vitiated both theoretically and practically. A critical

75. Cumming not unreasonably translates the word “Aporie” as “dilemma.” *Aporia* is a Greek word meaning literally “no passage” and figuratively “perplexity.” Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xiii.

76. The subtitle of the book in German, omitted from Cumming’s English version, is *Philosophische Fragmente*.

theory must at least diagnose what is wrong with society. Diagnoses are practical and have to connect with possible remedies. A critical theory that was self-contradictory would be of no use to agents of social change, either now or in the future. Social agents, the addressees of the theory, simply would not know what to do with it. So it seems that Adorno and Horkheimer cannot, on pain of inconsistency with the idea of critical theory, adduce broadly moral grounds in support of their conclusions. This is important, for we must not fall into the trap of thinking that because they have a dialectical approach (which they do) they welcome inconsistency or contradiction in their own theory (which they do not).

Now consider the other horn of the dilemma. Does it matter if critical theory's broadly moral conclusions are unsupported? It does matter, but for slightly different reasons. Diagnoses are essentially evidence-based. A hunch or a lucky guess is simply not good enough. The point of a diagnosis of social pathology is not just correctly to identify, describe, and classify a defect. The practical point is not to stimulate social change by inciting the blind motivations of social agents; that would be to treat the agents of change as a means to ends antecedently set by the theorist. A critical theory of society has to be able to connect with the actions of social agents and to be translated into a socially transforming or reforming practice on the basis of reasons. The diagnostic aim of critical theory is to reveal why the social change is needed, and thus to show why it is justified. It will only succeed in this if can help to provide reasons that are transparent and compelling. Hence, social criticism, in its diagnostic and remedial aims, has to be sensitive to reasons and justifications broadly construed.

Insofar as Adorno and Horkheimer have a response to the normative problem, then, it is to leave their conclusions unsupported and to explain why this must be so, by showing how the historical aporia—the dialectic of enlightenment—generates the dilemma of the theory and the form appropriate to its expression. It is this response that Habermas, in my view rightly, rejects as inadequate, which raises the question of what a more adequate response would be.

#### ***IV. Subsequent Developments in Critical Theory Considered as Responses to the Normative Problem***

What I call the normative problem has been highly influential in shaping both the ongoing reinterpretation of first generation critical theory by later

commentators, and the development of critical social theory by subsequent generations of Frankfurt School theorists.<sup>77</sup> My way of construing the problem can help to plot the trajectory of such developments.

### *Adorno*

After many years in which the moral dimension of his philosophy was neglected, there is now a growing number of interpreters of Adorno's work who answer the normative problem by fitting out Adorno with a normative ethical theory, which, they argue, is already implicit in his philosophy, or can be reconstructed from his central philosophical concerns, or is one that he would and could have gone on to develop.<sup>78</sup> I cannot discuss these in detail here. Suffice it to say that all these responses to the normative problem in Adorno deny premise 5 and hence face two immediate problems. The first is to provide an adequate response to the several considerations underlying first generation critical theory's rejection of morality as the basis of critical social theory adumbrated in section 3 above. The second is not to sacrifice the distinctive character of Frankfurt School social theory on the altar of theoretical propriety, and to show how a normatively well-grounded *critical* theory differs, if it does, from other traditions of normative social and political philosophy.

Against this trend, there has been a recent attempt to reconstruct Adorno and Horkheimer's critical theory as a normative enterprise lying, so to speak, below the threshold of the moral. Honneth has recently championed such a view. He notes that their typical claim that the social world is "false" can either be understood as a moral claim about social injustice, or as a claim about the existence of a social pathology that, unlike the former, remains "below the normative threshold at which moral judgments

77. As a matter of fact, these two projects, the re-interpretation of the legacy of critical theory, on the one hand, and the renewal and development of it, on the other, overlap to a very considerable degree. This signals a danger, namely, that contemporary critical theory takes refuge in interpreting the work of the first generation Frankfurt School and becomes a kind of heritage park of intellectual history.

78. Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz: Adornos negative Moralphilosophie* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1993); Mirko Wischke, *Kritik der Ethik des Gehorsams: zum Moralproblem bei Theodor W. Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993); Ulrich Kohlmann, *Dialektik der Moral: Untersuchungen zur Moralphilosophie Adornos* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1997); Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*; Finlayson, "Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable"; Freyhagen, *Adorno's Negativistic Ethics*.

of the justice of the social order are located” and thus “must mean something like ‘unwholesome (healthy)’ or ‘anomalous,’ presupposing an idea of social perfection as the standard.”<sup>79</sup> He advocates the latter reading. Honneth’s reinterpretation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* faces the difficulty of finding and adducing non-moral normative grounds adequate to support critical theory’s (broadly moral) normative aims and conclusions. As I see it, the social perfectionism to which Honneth’s reinterpretation of Adorno and Horkheimer’s work appeals, falls squarely within the domain of morality broadly construed. Hence Honneth’s reconstruction of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* fails to solve the normative problem that besets it, and just reproduces it. I suggest, although I cannot argue for this here, that the same applies to Honneth’s own renewal of critical theory with the aid of recognition theory. Honneth cannot solve the normative problem without relying *malgré lui* on what amount to perfectionist considerations.<sup>80</sup>

### *Habermas*

We began by noting that most commentators assume with Honneth and others that Habermas attempts to solve the normative problem by supplying critical theory with normative foundations, i.e., that his solution to the normative problem is to deny thesis 5. It is further assumed that this explains the relation between Habermas’s discourse ethics and his wider social theory. The plausibility of this view is lent credence by two features of Habermas’s overall theoretical project: (a) the centrality of discourse ethics within his mature social and political theory; and (b) Habermas’s insistence that discourse ethics centers on the formal derivation of the moral principle (U) from the rules of discourse, understood as pragmatic preconditions of communicative action.

Although superficially plausible, the widespread view is questionable, and the evidence for it slight.

(a) While it is true that discourse ethics is central to Habermas’s mature theory, this is not because it provides the missing normative foundations of critical theory (if we understand by “normative” broadly moral)

79. Honneth, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society,” pp. 121–22.

80. Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* and *Leiden am Unbestimmtheit*. See also van den Brink and Owen, eds., *Recognition and Power*, pp. 323–70. I think Honneth might agree with this, and also bite the bullet on the second difficulty just mentioned. But in that case there is a real question about whether there is anything distinctive about (first or third generation) Frankfurt School critical theory.

but because it elucidates the moral fabric of the actual modern social world, which, according to Habermas, is held together by various overlapping spheres of discourse (among other things like the state, the rule of law, administrative systems, and the market) at whose center is moral discourse.

(b) Habermas only asserts that a formal derivation of (U) from the rules of discourse is possible, he never actually provides one, and in fact there is overwhelming reason to think it cannot be done.<sup>81</sup> Besides, Habermas now concedes that discourse ethics is broadly moral from the ground up, i.e., he denies that it attempts to justify the moral point of view on the basis of non-moral premises.<sup>82</sup>

The evidence against the widespread view, by contrast, is compelling.

(c) Principle (U) is a second-order principle that is supposed to capture the real-life *procedure* by which participants in discourse supposedly determine the validity of first-order moral norms. (U) is not itself a valid moral norm. Therefore (U) cannot and does not provide the normative basis of Habermas's social theory. Habermas explicitly refrains from stating à la Rawls that society ought to conform to (U) (or the principles of justice, or anything of that ilk) and from wielding (U) as a criterion against which society can be directly assessed. Rather, he advances the sociological and empirical sounding claim that a society whose institutions and practices are out of kilter with its moral principles is likely to be unstable and riven by social conflict and cognitive dissonance.

(d) Even if principle (U) were a valid moral norm (which it is not) and could be used to determine the justice of a form of life (which it cannot), Habermas makes clear, here and elsewhere, that it is not up to critical social theorists, in their capacity as experts, to voice such criticism: moral

81. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 97. On the impossibility of a formal derivation of (U), see J. G. Finlayson, "Modernity and Morality in Habermas's Discourse Ethics," *Inquiry* 43, no. 3 (2000): 319–40.

82. This denial is implicit in Habermas's endorsement of Rehg's interpretation of discourse ethics. William Rehg, *Insight and Solidarity: The Discourse Ethics of Jürgen Habermas* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994). Habermas has also made this point explicit in private correspondence with me. However, Christoph Lumer and Logi Gunnarsson have shown persuasively that Habermas originally conceived the justification of the moral standpoint—and the derivation of (U)—as an argument from non-moral premises, and as an attempt to refute the moral skeptic. Lumer, "Habermas's Diskursethik," *Zeitschrift für philosophischen Forschung* 51 (1997): 42–64; Logi Gunnarsson, *Making Moral Sense: Beyond Habermas and Gauthier* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 97–104.

criticism must come from social agents themselves. Social criticism, to the extent that it is based on normative (moral or ethical) grounds, is rooted in the lifeworld and gets whatever leverage it has because it comes from social agents and participants in lifeworld practices themselves. By Habermas's lights, only agents and participants in discourse can make validity claims to rightness, and only as such do they have access to the normative resources of the lifeworld, to valid moral norms and ethical values. Habermas qua social theorist, by contrast, offers his rational reconstruction of the moral standpoint from his perspective as expert and observer. It follows that discourse ethics, which is a rational reconstruction of moral point of view embedded in an account of the social function of morality, cannot make good the "missing" normative foundations (understood as broadly moral reasons and arguments) of critical theory.

Worse, to claim that the program of discourse ethics supplies the normative foundations of critical theory is to misrepresent the justificatory role of the program of discourse ethics and to misconstrue its relation to Habermas's wider social and political theory. Discourse ethics forms only one module among various others—the legal and political theory, the social theory, the theory of communicative rationality, and the pragmatic theory of meaning—that together constitute a comprehensive theory of society.<sup>83</sup> They are justified insofar as they fit together coherently and answer responsibly to the social world. It is wrong to think of the moral theory, as it were, in the basement and the other modules arranged on top.

Contrary to this mistaken, yet widespread, interpretation of Habermas's work, his actual response to the normative problem, i.e., the one that he actually adopts in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, is to reject premises 2 and 3. In other words in diagnosing what is "wrong" with the social world, Habermas's social theory does not make any broadly moral claims about it. Habermas maintains that the chief task of a critical theory of society is the diagnosis of "social pathologies." A social pathology can

83. Rainer Forst asserts that Habermas's social theory, like Walzer's social criticism, is based on thin normative principles of justification and posits "certain standards of human moral agency." Forst, "Justice, Reason and Critique: Basic Concepts of Critical Theory," in Rasmussen, ed., *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p. 147. To my mind this smudges the most important difference between them: whereas for Walzer social criticism is a first-order broadly moral enterprise, Habermas denies that social theory is and can be a first-order broadly moral enterprise.



be thought of as a kind of malfunction or defect of society as a whole.<sup>84</sup> On this view, the normative force of critical social theory is understood by analogy with that of medicine. We can know what is wrong with a human being, or a human organ, without making any kind of broadly moral judgment about them. Similarly with a system of public transport, we can tell if it is good or bad, and can maybe explain what is *wrong* with it, without making any moral judgments about it. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, this approach is extended to various spheres of social life. In my view, this is the most helpful way to understand Habermas's colonization thesis, and may be the best way to understand the normative status of his social and political thought as a whole. If so, we should conclude that Habermas's actual response to the normative problem is to attempt to hold a normative position below the level of the broadly moral, but above the level of description and empirical observation. The solution that Habermas attempts is far more like the one that Honneth mistakenly attributes to Adorno and Horkheimer, than it is to that of Rawls, or Walzer, or most other strands of contemporary Anglo-American social and political philosophy.

One (though not the only) reason why Habermas has had to contend with the criticism that his theory is not critical enough, and not a genuine *critical* theory, is that it leaves him no basis for moral condemnation.<sup>85</sup> Some take the view that Habermas has addressed this criticism by normatively enriching his later political theory. I am not convinced. Nor am I convinced that Habermas's solution to the normative problem is a tenable one. After all, the analogy with medicine (or psychoanalysis) and the quasi-medical language of "the diagnosis of social pathology" is only an indication of the kind of position that Habermas wants to occupy, not a fully worked-out defense of that position.

I am, however, convinced that the received view that Habermas's social theory in *The Theory of Communicative Action* marks a departure from Frankfurt School critical theory on the question of normative grounds needs to be revised substantially. Insofar as Habermas, the social theorist, eschews broadly moral reasons as the basis of critical social theory,

84. Honneth has explored the significance of the idea of social pathology for critical theory in several recent articles. See note 13 above.

85. For example, see the various essays in Gerhard Bolte, ed., *Unkritische Theorie: Gegen Habermas* (Lüneberg: zu Klampen, 1989).



he stands squarely in the tradition of first generation Frankfurt School critical theory. I believe this holds true in respect of his later theory too. Habermas, who has been among the harshest critics of his first generation Frankfurt School teachers, is in this respect one of their most consistent pupils.<sup>86</sup>

86. Thanks are due to Fabian Freyenhagen and Christian Skirke, who have helped me develop my ideas on this topic. Thanks also to Andrew Chitty, Michael Morris, Michael Rosen, David (A. D.) Smith, Henry Pickford, Michael Tooley, Nicholas Joll, Fred Neuhauser, Timo Juetten, Berndt Ladwig, to various participants at the Colloquium on Philosophy and Social Science at the Villa Lana, Prague, who attended my talk in May 2006, and to all those who attended the talk I gave as guest of the program in law and philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin, in Fall 2007, especially Brian Leiter and Oren Bracha.

# *Metaphysical Elements in the Aesthetics of Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer*

Joshua Rayman

Many well-known works in twentieth-century continental aesthetics, such as Martin Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art," Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, Michel Foucault's "Las Meninas," and the two most influential Frankfurt School texts on aesthetics, Walter Benjamin's optimistic "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility"<sup>1</sup> and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's pessimistic "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,"<sup>2</sup> treat aesthetics as an occasion for a critique of metaphysics. Hence, it is reasonable to assess these works by reference to whether they retain metaphysical categories, concepts, or methodologies. In this regard, the essays of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin surely fail, for they explicitly direct their arguments against metaphysics, while preserving, in certain respects, metaphysical language, concepts, and operations. Yet, their essays remain perhaps the most widely read and influential in twentieth-century aesthetics, precisely because their arguments that modern culture has destroyed the artwork's

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217–51. I have checked all citations from Benjamin against the German second edition, and I have modified the unreliable English translation of the essay, which uses the title from the French, rather than the German, edition. Page references will be given parenthetically within the text.

2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming. (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 120–67. I have also modified the English translation of this essay, which sacrifices literality for idiomatic English. Page references will be given parenthetically within the text.

singular presence<sup>3</sup> seem to set forth a post-metaphysical aesthetics. This notion is doubly mistaken. Both “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” and “The Culture Industry” sustain a metaphysics in articulating the dream of immediate presence, but they respond in markedly different ways to the metaphysical questions of being as presence, truth, universality, singularity, and the ontological difference. “The Culture Industry” develops its critique of metaphysics by an implicit critique of Benjaminian technology. However, this critique, with its presuppositions and norms of metaphysical truth and reality, resurrects the pre-technical metaphysics putatively destroyed by Benjamin’s critique of auratic art. In dispelling any recovery of a metaphysics of presence, Benjamin preserves the metaphysics of presence in the historical concept of the aura, the bivalent Enlightenment logic, and the ontotheological other nature of technology. The preservation of metaphysics in the two texts undermines their ability to constitute a radical critique, because it places their work on a common substratum with the one-sided, ahistorical, idealist or materialist philosophies that they seek to overcome. In so doing, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin subject their work to precisely the same charge that they would level against metaphysics, namely, that their work is implicitly conformist in articulating a dynamic world by means of static, reified categories destructive of history, change, and differences. But a fragmentary reading of the two texts *in combination* provides resources for a thoroughgoing critique of metaphysics by shifting the canonical terminology, operations, and subject matter of aesthetics.

### ***I. “The Culture Industry” and the Aesthetics of Presence***

In “The Culture Industry,” Adorno and Horkheimer apply a metaphysical critique of metaphysical operations in industry. Throughout the text, they use metaphysical concepts of truth and untruth (120–21, 137–38,

3. These two texts are close not only because Adorno and Horkheimer “were replying to” Benjamin’s “The Work of Art” when they wrote “The Culture Industry,” as Andreas Huyssen argues (John Docker, “‘A Hermaphroditic Position’: Benjamin, Postmodernism and the Frenzy of Gender,” in Gerhard Fischer, ed., *With the Sharpened Axe of Reason: Approaches to Walter Benjamin* [Washington, DC: Berg, 1996], p. 70, citing Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide*), but also because Benjamin wrote “The Work of Art” for Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* and when he wrote the widely disseminated second version, he was responding to Adorno and Horkheimer’s criticisms of the first version. There was continual discussion among Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer prior to the appearance (or non-appearance) of many of Benjamin’s articles in the 1930s.

142, 144, 154, 157, 165), lies and falsity/fiction/artificiality (121, 125, 135, 141, 147–49, 155, 159), concealment/deceit/the secret<sup>4</sup> (133, 139–40, 142, 156, 158, 160–61), the real or actual (126, 130–31, 135, 139, 141, 143, 145, 147–48, 160), illusion/ideology (126, 130, 154, 159), liberation (158), and identity or the same (120–21, 123–24, 127–28, 145, 154–55, 163, 166–67). The examples could be multiplied ad nauseam. This is not to say that Adorno's writings are always metaphysical<sup>5</sup> or that Benjamin's are not.<sup>6</sup> But if we set aside the metaphysical project of assessing the philosophy of a unified subject over many years of writing and concentrate on these two essays, we recognize quite a different dynamic. On every page of "The Culture Industry," Adorno and Horkheimer valorize the metaphysics of presence, as defined not only by Heidegger and Derrida, but also by a legion of historians of philosophy, through their metaphysical terminology and critique of untruth. Despite their rejection of the culture industry's conservatism and its Enlightenment illusions of presence, they enact the

4. Examples of these uses of truth as unveiling are abundant: "Finally the dictate of production, concealed by the pretense of the possibility of choice, can for once go beyond the specific advertisement into the open command of the Führer" (160); the debased works of art "are secretly rejected by the fortunate recipients . . . [w]ho are supposed to be delighted by the mere fact that there is so much to see and hear" (161); "the deceived masses" (133); "[t]he work of art, by completely assimilating itself to need, deceives men beforehand of precisely that liberation from the principle of utility which it should afford" (158).

5. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, in particular, relies on metaphysical terminology while undermining metaphysical structures. Horkheimer's writings are less radical.

6. I say this because Benjamin's earlier writings and his messianic texts are metaphysical in terminology and claims. Docker notices in Benjamin "[t]he Adornoesque desire to deliver truths about modernity and mass culture in a language of essence [that] mingles with an allegorical method that fissures and splinters the object of analysis. . . . Representativeness encounters singularity" ("A Hermaphroditic Position," p. 76); "Adornoesque meets arabesque. . . . The argument stages stabs at essentializing explanation, then moves off again into doubt, that Baudelaire, the text's supposed representative cultural figure of the nineteenth century, has been explained, that he or any other cultural figure and historical period is explicable. The text works at uncovering Baudelaire for dissection, description and analysis, yet comes across mask after mask; the clear outlines of an essential, illuminated Baudelaire beckon, appear graspable, then fade into enigma and rebus" (ibid., p. 73). See also Gary Smith, ed., *Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989); Gary Smith, ed., *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); and Kurt Oppens et al., *Über Theodor W. Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), especially Oppens, "Zu den musikalischen Schriften Theodor W. Adornos" (pp. 7–27), Hans Kudszus, "Die Kunst versöhnt mit der Welt" (pp. 28–34), Jürgen Habermas, "Ein philosophierender Intellektueller" (pp. 35–43), and Bernard Willms, "Theorie, Kritik und Dialektik" (pp. 44–89).

same metaphysical logic, for they imagine art's return to undeconstructed notions of presence, truth, and reality.<sup>7</sup> While Benjamin's argument, which in many ways is less sophisticated, retains vestiges of metaphysical logic, language, and categories, such as reality and illusion,<sup>8</sup> it exhibits the appearance and destruction of metaphysical presence in distinguishing auratic art's singular presence from the new technologies' radical, irreversible transformation of the artwork. This destruction, combined with his turn away from metaphysical vocabulary, distances his essay, in crucial respects, from the totalizing sphere of "Enlightenment reason" and its metaphysics of presence, despite his use of a bivalent logic, his auratic metaphysics, and his messianic, technological metaphysics.

The different metaphysics of the two texts can be traced to their divergent approaches to historical-technological transformations of universal-singular relations. Whereas Benjamin focuses on the general technological changes determining the production and structure of artworks generalized by their technical reproduction,<sup>9</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer move back and

7. "For the demonstration of its divine nature, the actual [*das Wirkliche*] is always repeated purely cynically" (147–48); "behind the actual" (143); "[t]hat moment in a work of art through which it transcends reality [*Wirklichkeit*]" (131).

8. See Benjamin, "The Work of Art," pp. 232–34. The English translation has *Gegebenheit* as "reality" rather than the more literal "givenness" (ibid., p. 223) and *Hier und Jetzt* as "presence" rather than "here and now" (ibid., p. 220) is misleading. *Hier* and *Jetzt* are the words Hegel uses in place of the traditional space and time in "Sense Certainty" at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

9. We should distinguish here between the general technical structures and the singular artworks, which have become generalized insofar as they are all the same, and therefore identify with the general model. In Benjamin there is no such general model and therefore no identification between universal and singular; thus, the negative is the condition for the print, but the print is the inverse of the negative, not its copy. In acknowledging Adorno's criticism of the Baudelaire manuscript, Benjamin expresses the problem in terms of a general description of the matter versus a foundationalist theory: "I do not have to be told twice how gladly you would trade the panoramic overview of the subject matter for a more precise realization of its theoretical underpinnings" (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, August 6, 1939, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994], p. 611). Toward the end of his life, Adorno wrote that "Benjamin was by nature inclined to express the general through an extreme of the particular, through what was proper to himself, and he suffered so acutely on that account that he searched for collectivities—to be sure, fitfully and in vain—even in his maturity" (Adorno, "Benjamin the Letter Writer," in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. xx). In a letter to the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Benjamin writes that in his writing on Moscow, "I made an attempt to depict the concrete phenomena of daily life, which affected me most

forth discursively between universal, economic-technical processes and their homogeneous, singular products. By arguing that the culture industry<sup>10</sup> collapses the distinction between universals and singulars, Adorno and Horkheimer justify their references to the singular effects of the culture industry and the general, essentialistic effects of technical functions on homogenization, such as “[t]he immanent tendency of radio . . . to make the human word, the false commandment, absolute” (159), “a shift in the internal, economic composition [*Zusammensetzung*] of cultural commodities” (158), “[t]he technical structure of the commercial radio system” (which “makes it immune from liberal deviations such as those the movie industrialists can still permit themselves in their own sphere”) (159), and “a change in the commodity character of art itself,” enabled by mass production’s low cost (157).<sup>11</sup>

The key to this destruction of universal-singular differences lies in its systematic or total character. The culture industry destroys differences not merely by concealing them, but by subsuming them under the universal, that is, constructing them formally in terms consonant with its falsely universal system. The unifying drive of the power mechanisms in the culture industry repeats, homogenizes, and subordinates all things to its totality, including language, the paradigm of conventional universality, which is deprived of its differences (166) and transformed into a universal language shorn of appropriative or differential functions. “[T]he irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction, through their subordination to one

deeply, just as they are and without any theoretical excursions, even if not without taking a personal stance toward them. Because I did not know the language, I was of course unable to get beyond one specific and narrow stratum of society” (Letter from Benjamin to von Hofmannsthal, June 5, 1927, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 314).

10. They do not define the culture industry, but they suggest that it is a synonym for popular culture, and they explicitly include popular music (Glenn Miller, Toscanini), Hollywood, advertising, radio, electricity, electronics, and mass production. Their inability to define the culture industry suggests that their method allows them only to grasp a vague universal, rather than a determinate universal.

11. Contemporary radio marketing makes claims about radio’s power that equal anything in Adorno and Horkheimer. According to Arbitron’s *Radio Marketing Guide and Fact Book 2002–3*, “Radio works [because] radio is selective . . . mobile . . . intrusive . . . cost-efficient . . . intimate . . . gets the last word.” From an economic perspective, radio’s power derives from its ability to penetrate all aspects of life efficiently, to insinuate itself into the conscious and unconscious lives of *consumers*, and to follow them from their offices to their cars, their homes, and even their outdoor activities. Adorno and Horkheimer’s specific claims about the culture industry are easily confirmable; the difficulty is that their piecemeal evidence cannot support generalizations.

end, are reduced to one false formula: the totality of the culture industry” (136); even “[n]ature and technology are mobilized against” alterity (149). Although the concept of uniformity would seem to preclude hierarchy, Adorno and Horkheimer define the culture industry’s uniformity by the universal’s domination over the singular: “Everything appearing is so fundamentally stamped that nothing more can come forth by now that does not in advance bear the trace of jargon or does not show itself as approved from the first glance” (128); “every single manifestation of the culture industry reproduces human beings as that for which the whole has made them” (127); “[f]ilms, radio and magazines make up a system. Every part is of one voice [*einstimmig*, agrees, is harmonious] in the system and all together”; “[t]he striking unity of macrocosm and microcosm demonstrates to men the model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular” (120–21).

Hegel scholars often argue that the determination of the singular by the universal constitutes nothing more than a logical subsumption. But in the political-technical-epistemological discourse of Adorno and Horkheimer, the totalization of universality justifiably bespeaks a totalitarian political program, for the singular product of the culture industry, despite its apparently neutral status as a representative of independent existence, exists only in terms governed by the universal. Standardization extends from production and distribution to their general technological conditions; “[e]ven the technical media are driven among themselves into relentless uniformity” (124). The culture industry dissolves opposition or individuality by producing (an image of) the totality as an unremitting, uniform sameness, even in time or nature. “A constant sameness rules the relationship to the past as well” (134). The system does not only “falsely” proclaim its own universality; it also totalizes itself through this ontic-ontological dissolution of individual differences.

This presentation of the culture industry apes the paradigmatic metaphysical unity of Parmenidean being, with its identification of thinking and being, in that it constructs its aesthetic reality as one, everywhere the same, and unchanging, destroying the space of difference. In its material and formal repetition of standardized stories and characters, the culture industry defines a world governed by an essential unity, where “[t]he perfect similarity is the absolute difference” (145). Here no differences are not already mediated by the universal. Even the mutations are calculated, conforming to a preexisting pattern, and therefore serving the



system (129). The “individual moments . . . becom[e] detachable, interchangeable, and even technically alienated from any connected meaning” (163). In thus destroying individual differences through its uniform productions, the culture industry sets an impossible mathematical identity as its *telos* and absolute law. In advertising and the culture industry, “the same appears in innumerable places, and the mechanical repetition of the same culture product is already that of the same propaganda slogan” (163). The uniformity of its productions effaces its much-vaunted “free choice”; therefore, the “freedom in the choice of an ideology . . . shows itself in all cases as freedom [to choose] what is always the same” (166–67). The culture industry enacts a kind of eternal recurrence of the same, since it produces not one product but many and in narrative form the product is endlessly repeated. This absolutization of sameness eliminates the universal-singular distinction, and thus the possibility of a correspondence between universals and singulars. The “true nature” of the culture industry is that it destroys the differences constitutive of metaphysical truth.

Adorno and Horkheimer can justify their movement between systematic and specific analysis only by asserting the destruction of the ontological difference. Their argument is not just that individual differences in cultural messages presuppose the identical technical framework and metaphysics or anti-metaphysics, but that there are no *significant* individual differences; the culture industry erases the difference between universal and singular. The product is identified with the process, for the culture industry is its own product. The point is not the particular character of any film or performance, but the play of industrial forces operative in, and determinative of, it. Adorno and Horkheimer’s hazy definition of the culture industry ceases to be a problem if the industry is itself determined in and through the analysis of “individual” cultural products. There is no longer a need to collect all the culture industry’s possible individual manifestations in a unity, since the part contains the whole.

This argument to the homogeneity of universals and singulars precludes any genetic account, for it rules out the attempt to explain this uniformity either from a universal or a singular perspective. If it is true that the culture industry collapses the universal-singular distinction, then this can be proved neither by reference to a universal truth, nor to singulars, since the culture industry eliminates the “space” for an extra-systematic, critical, or veridical standpoint. Hence, the claim that the culture industry immerses everything in the same totalizing framework could not be made

if it were true. The victory, the truth, of the culture industry, defined by the totalization of its systematic uniformity, would eliminate the critical distance necessary to determine its truth or falsity by dissolving all claims to difference or transcendence.

This absolute reduction would also destroy the project of critical theory, for it would prevent Adorno and Horkheimer from differentiating the specific products of the culture industry from the means of production. In claiming that the culture industry homogenizes universals and singulars, they justify their claim to articulate the meaning of both structural determinants and their singular products. This claim to the homogenization of universal and singular enables critical analysis to incessantly cross the line between universal and singular, to explain the universal by reference to singulars and singulars by reference to the universal. Thus, the notion that the culture industry destroys the ontological difference justifies Adorno and Horkheimer's attempt to determine the whole by looking at a few cultural products. This argument is powerful, because it protects their account of the culture industry from a critique of induction. However, their structural analysis cannot account for individual differences, because the existence of these differences would falsify their claim that the culture industry effects a uniformity between singular and universal. It would also subvert their ability to describe the culture industry generically, for if universals and singulars are different, then the attempt to grasp these differences involves transcending, or generalizing from, singulars, since the singulars no longer express the truth of the universals. But this *a posteriori* inductive methodology would validate the empirical and inductive critiques of "The Culture Industry."

Inductive methods necessarily fail to grasp the totality of possible singulars, since their evidence is limited to an isolated group of singulars and cannot therefore account for the innumerable, unexperienced singulars. The problem for Adorno and Horkheimer is that if they claim merely empirical universality, then their unsupported generalizations and questionable interpretations would have to be abandoned in the face of detailed cultural analysis or positivistic empirical study, even apart from any Humean critique of induction or reflective judgment.<sup>12</sup> For instance, they would have to surrender their claim that "[o]ne 'has to' have seen *Mrs.*

12. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1977).

*Miniver*, just as one ‘has to’ subscribe to *Life and Time*” (158), since they fail to trace the source or extent of such popular maxims. It is not that their examples are poorly chosen. *Mrs. Miniver*, the wretched, almost unwatchable story of an Englishwoman who captures a downed German pilot in World War II, epitomizes the culture industry’s propagandistic function. Embraced by the cultural and political establishment, it won the Academy Award for best picture, was called “one of the greatest motion pictures of all time” by the *New York Times* in 1942, and was thought to serve as such an effective propaganda device that Roosevelt had the final, moving speech printed in propaganda pamphlets and dropped over Europe and Churchill said that it did more good for England’s cause than a battalion of soldiers. (The director, William Wyler, was himself flying a bombing mission over Germany when the Academy Award was announced.) *Mrs. Miniver* is a perfect example of the seamless blending of culture industry, propaganda, and war. But Adorno and Horkheimer refuse to consider the problem of generalizing inductively from several examples or perceptions, for they construct their argument in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of its empirical falsification. This is evident in their identifying a single program as “the meaningful content of every film, whatever plot the production team may have selected” (124). This blind, universalizing assertion performatively enacts the culture industry’s “false” project. It describes “reality” according to the universalizing, identitarian model of the culture industry, excluding in advance the possibility of its falsification. In other cases, they do not level such reductive charges, but they appeal implicitly to an empirical analysis without showing a fraction of the work necessary to prove empirical generalizations about culture and society.<sup>13</sup>

13. Docker criticizes them for their positivism, their ungrounded generalizations, and their essentialism, tracing it back to Q. D. Leavis’s facile empirical characterizations of mass culture. Thus, Docker says dismissively that “Adorno and Horkheimer knew the truth, as in the ‘true kind of relationship’ people should have but can’t in America. They know that art is always opposed in a binary way to mass culture, and that it must involve tragedy, pain, the ascetic, the austere. They know what mass culture invariably is, though their textual acquaintance with it seems disablingly slim, and they know the ‘whole inner state’ of mass audiences and Americans and humanity generally” (Docker, “‘A Hermaphroditic Position,’” p. 70). The problem is that “it’s difficult to see what kind of ethnography Adorno and Horkheimer have engaged in in order to arrive at such knowledge. [They] simply assert, with a kind of magical positivism, what ‘girls in the audience’ are feeling. They somehow know the ‘whole inner life’ of these young women, how they talk on the

A Kantian schematization of this universal-singular relation in terms of analytic, synthetic, *a priori*, *a posteriori*, reflective, and determinative judgments demonstrates the inadequacy of the critical problematic in Adorno and Horkheimer. If the culture industry could collapse the universal-singular distinction, establish a synthetic *a priori* connection between universal concept and the *form* of the singular product, or show that the universal determined the singular absolutely, as in a determinative or analytic *a priori* judgment, then error or incompleteness in characterizing singulars would be irrelevant. Determinative judgment would preserve the universal's dominance over the singular; the collapse of the universal-singular distinction would necessitate their uniformity. But any reversal of the universal-singular hierarchy, as in induction, reflective judgment, or synthetic *a posteriori* judgment, would subject "The Culture Industry" to empirical critique, for the recognition or verification of the universal would depend on empirical verification of singulars. The same problem would obtain if Adorno and Horkheimer accepted the universal-singular hierarchy according to the foreclosed Kantian category of the analytic *a posteriori*. In an analytic judgment, according to Kant, predicate B is said to belong "to the subject A, as something which is (covertly) contained in this concept A."<sup>14</sup> An analytic *a posteriori* judgment, as Andrew Cutrofello argues,<sup>15</sup> would verify this predicate B from concept A by reference to experience. Kant argues that it would be absurd, a sign of madness, to claim to *verify* an analytic judgment, such as "all bachelors are unmarried," by reference to experience, although this would not be *impossible*, and it would not be absurd to *exhibit* an analytic judgment in intuition, such as by pointing to an unmarried bachelor.<sup>16</sup> Analytic *a posteriori* judgments would *verify* universal concepts by reference to "concrete" actuality without generating these concepts on the basis of singulars. This account describes Adorno and Horkheimer's methods in "The Culture Industry," for they produce their concepts independently of singulars, exhibit them experientially by pointing to standardized culture-industry productions, and claim to verify

telephone, how they accept and keep a date, what their psychic state is in the 'most intimate situation'" (ibid.).

14. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, cited in Andrew Cutrofello, *Imagining Otherwise: Metapsychology and the Analytic A Posteriori* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1997), p. 9.

15. Cutrofello, *Imagining Otherwise*, p. 16.

16. Ibid., p. 10.

them by reference to concrete cases, yet they explicitly rule out the possibility of any experiential disconfirmation of their concepts.

This explains why Adorno and Horkheimer accent the culture industry's destruction of the universal-singular distinction, even if this destruction is false, for it justifies their method of determining the totality by reference to singulars. This ideological tale of the culture industry constitutes a metaphysical dream of identity; there is no longer any tripartite Kantian distinction between universal, particular, and singular quantities. The universal and the singular are the same, and this homogeneity either dissolves or absolutizes particularity.<sup>17</sup> On the side of the universal, the culture industry's uniform logic makes evaluative standards unintelligible by destroying the possibility of a critical or universal distance from singulars;<sup>18</sup> on the side of the singular, the culture industry's absolute universalization destroys everything concrete and individual by reducing the singular to this unifying, objectifying technical form.

The text's constant shifts from the culture industry's realization and its falsity can be traced to an equivocation between the real world and the culture industry's ideological world. While later continental aesthetics restricts itself to textual deconstruction, Adorno and Horkheimer offer both internal and external critiques of the culture industry. In referring to the culture industry, they write both intratextually of the unified world exhibited or ideologically described, and extratextually of its inadequacy to the world that it models. Critical theory asserts the culture industry's failure to attain its explicit premise of difference internally, since the differences within its productions are illusory, or to effect in the world its tacit premise of homogenizing universal and singular under the aegis of the universal, since the identity of universal and singular is "false." Internally, the culture industry presents differences, so it would be inaccurate to characterize its own story as reductive, but these differences are always already formulated according to a standard model. Hence, they are not what they appear to be. The singular is always already mediated by the universal. Externally, the culture industry's "real" model of a uniform world falsely identifies the universal and the singular. The metaphysical uniformity

17. Adorno and Horkheimer refer to particularity as if it were indistinguishable from singularity.

18. Benjamin argues that film puts the spectator into the position of the impartial critic, rather than destroying the possibility of critique by eliminating the difference of the universal from the singular.

produced by the culture industry's "art" justifies critical theory's claim to determine the universal by reference to singulars, but it also provides the critical distance necessary to determine this uniformity, as long as the internal-external difference between the real world and the false world of the culture industry is maintained. However, there is a sense in which the culture industry is in the process of dissolving the difference between external society and its productions. This process of cultural homogenization underlies Adorno and Horkheimer's much maligned characterizations of the rote patter of the housewife or the salesman, the false, objectified familiarity of American relationships. Cultural homogenization breaks down the distinction between screen and world, and thus between textual critique and *Realkritik*.<sup>19</sup> Hence, technical mastery in imitating experiential objects makes it easier "today for the illusion [*Täuschung*] to prevail that the outside world is the unbroken extension of that which one meets on the screen" (126). Yet, this falsity is being transformed into truth through the culture industry's dominance: "life is becoming indistinguishable from the sound-film" (126). The meaning of the text's claims to the culture industry's totality, then, is that it presents a false, ideological uniformity that is becoming real.

Yet, the negative form of this account of the culture industry is not final or irrevocable, for Adorno and Horkheimer claim that it is possible to unveil the repressed truth and reality of the culture industry's domination. This belief in truth, presence, and a quasi-return of the repressed is manifest positively in their references to "[I]anguage that refers entirely to truth," reality, "manifest truth" (147), "the real universality" of the lower classes,<sup>20</sup> and the truth (135). But they also imagine a return to presence in critiquing the *untruth* of this uniformity. In announcing the culture industry's untruth, its failure to generate this homogeneity, critical theory undermines its own methodological justification and restores the provenance of metaphysical truth, for it measures the culture industry's production against the reality of the (supposedly moribund) ontological

19. The term *Realkritik* is used by Herder as one of several types of linguistic analysis. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, ed. Hans Dietrich Irmischer (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1991), p. 179.

20. With respect to the lower class "with whose cause [*Sache*], that of the right [*richtigen*] universality, art keeps faith precisely by its freedom from the ends of the false universality" (135). Thus, for Adorno and Horkheimer, there is a "right universality," that of the lower class, and a "false universality," from which art would free itself.

difference. Hence, they describe the culture industry pejoratively as a magic-lantern show (143), an unreal, mystical promise that passes itself off falsely as the real, the non-metaphysical objective reality. This identification privileges a metaphysical “reality,” for the insidious result of the culture industry’s fakery is that we turn our backs to the actual, to truth (143). Their critique of the culture industry incessantly presupposes the true-false dichotomy. The culture industry steers between “the cliffs of demonstrable misinformation and manifest truth. . . . Ideology is split into the photography of stubborn existence [*Daseins*] and the naked lie about its meaning” (147). In maintaining this parasitic relation to truth, the culture industry ideologically appropriates the techniques of realism in order to conceal its own distortion of meaning. The culture industry justifies itself by its relation to truth, even as it refuses to submit itself to a non-instrumental notion of truth. Hence, film executives “wisely never make the truth into a counterexample” (137); “[I]anguage that refers itself merely to truth only awakens the impatience to get quickly to the end of business, which in actuality it is pursuing” (147). The culture industry relies on truth, but rejects its absolute authority, and this constitutes its fault in Adorno and Horkheimer’s eyes. Rather than interpreting the culture industry’s ambiguous relation to truth as a radical critique of metaphysical truth, they assert its inadequacy to a non-instrumental notion of truth as unveiling or manifesting of reality. Thus, their language is replete with pessimistic pronouncements concerning “the victory of technological reason over truth” (138). These negative references to the culture industry’s untruth presuppose a traditional model of falsity as a lack of an absent, positive truth or being.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer contrast “the false society” and “false laughter” with “reality” (141) and argue that the falsity of the culture industry can be revealed and ideology ended, if not through art alone (for “the claim of art is always ideology,” in the Socratic sense of substituting the aesthetic for the real) (130). The truth is transparent to them and them alone. They alone see that the emperor has no clothes, because they are free from the culture industry’s repression (thanks to the slow pace of its invasion of “prefascistic European” culture) (132–33), and therefore are just the ones to tell us the real truth that the culture industry has concealed in substituting its artificial vision for our own natural sight.

21. The stranger makes this argument in Plato’s *Sophist*, and it is also explicit in Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, among others.



We others see through a glass darkly, determined by the culture industry's artificial mechanisms. Adorno and Horkheimer's freedom allows them to see reality naturally as it really is, to see through the culture industry's hidden magic and faux naturalism (131).

The truth is at issue even in Adorno and Horkheimer's negative determinations and dialectical reversals, for they define negativity by reference to a positivity known to them. Negativity in their account always exhibits a distorted positivity, for the culture industry's falsity manifests the truth that it attempts to conceal. Thus, they explicitly connect their negative characterizations of the culture industry with its truth or reality. In their defense, it could be argued that Adorno and Horkheimer do not offer their own conception of metaphysical truth, but merely depict the culture industry's ideological truth negatively by reference to its failure to adequate to its posited reality. In this sense, this positivity would itself be defined by negativity, for Adorno and Horkheimer write that "[t]he split itself is the truth: it expresses at least the negativity of culture" (135). The truth of the culture industry is its falsity, its failure to effect a real correspondence between universal and singular. The means of liberating art from the culture industry is precisely to exhibit the truth of its falsity (that it is false). Yet, the question of truth is the explicit focus of their account of the culture industry. The task of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to subject enlightenment, and the culture industry, to the criteria of truth. This very process of opposing themselves to the logic of the culture industry sustains its Enlightenment framework, for in criticizing Enlightenment untruth and false consciousness, they preserve the Enlightenment belief in the possibility of truth, presence, and non-ideological thought. The explicit recognition of the text's own entanglement in the dialectic of enlightenment is consistent with its pessimistic message but also subverts their attempt to destroy the enlightenment logic by constituting a different model for thinking.

## ***II. Singularity and the Destruction of Presence in Benjamin***

Benjamin's technology critique inures him against the empirical and inductive critiques leveled at Adorno and Horkheimer, because it absolves him of the task of determining a totality by reference to singularity. Benjamin's task is simpler in that he traces the meaning of specific historical transformations in the concept of technology without sharing Adorno and Horkheimer's claim to an unmanageable, exhaustive analysis of Western

popular culture. As historical *a priori* analysis, Benjamin's method presupposes practical-historical changes in the structure of photographic, sound, and film technologies,<sup>22</sup> but it neither derives from, nor requires, an accurate historical examination of specific technological *uses*. Indeed, Benjamin's analysis of a post-auratic concept of art omits any consideration of particular manifestations of the new technologies, their historical context, or use. Hence, critiques of Benjamin's historical accuracy and comprehensiveness, such as Ian Knizek's, miss the point; these critiques apply only to arguments dependent on generalizing from specific analyses of cultural products.<sup>23</sup> The more appropriate question for Benjamin concerns the meaning and limits of his attempt to apply his conceptual analysis to specific technological products.

If Benjamin examines universal, structural, rather than particular, applied, technological questions, in contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, he crosses the universal-singular distinction in important ways, both in his analysis of technology and his understanding of political-technological relations. Benjamin's structural argument entails that the purely contingent transfer of the culture industry's control from capitalism to Marxism can never return us to the original, unabstracted presence of auratic art. Yet, technology exercises certain political effects. Thus, Benjamin mourns capitalism's destruction of film's potential as a revolutionary proletarian tool, in replacing the masses with the stars,<sup>24</sup> and he claims that these technologies

22. "For Benjamin, the structure of experience itself has been drastically altered through the course of industrial modernity" (Pierre Lamarche, "Tradition, Crisis, and the Work of Art in Benjamin and Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 45, no. 5 [2001]: 38).

23. Ian Knizek's critique of "The Work of Art" devalues Benjamin's primary thesis (Knizek, "Walter Benjamin and the Mechanical Reproducibility of Art Works Revisited," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 4 [October 1993]: 357), citing, e.g., Adorno's unhappiness with Benjamin's application of the term "aura" (*ibid.*, p. 358), as well as Brecht's criticism of the essay. The criticism of empirical inadequacy is also leveled at "The Culture Industry," and clearly neither essay adequately supports its account of mass culture, but they adopt distinct strategies for avoiding inductive problems. "The Culture Industry" denies the reducibility of concepts to singulars, whereas "The Work of Art" adopts a structural, technological analysis.

24. Thus, Julian Roberts notes how films construct the star-public polarity. "The vast technology of film was able to achieve what more primitive 'artistic' representations never could—a view of reality entirely devoid of intrusions by the 'artist'. This objectivity with its devastating reproduction of the mass movement was a fundamental break in the means of ideological production. And yet, as with photography, this was resisted by reaction, the main technique being to bring in the polarity of 'star' and 'public', thus breaking down

“are completely useless for the ends of Fascism . . . [but] useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art” (218; cf. 224), insofar as art’s technological conditions determine the limits of its application. The new technologies, on a general, transcendental level, determine or condition their singular products, making possible (without guaranteeing) a revolutionary art politics and excluding the possibility of fascist art. This claim to technological selectivity seems incredible when juxtaposed with the then contemporary exploitation of radio and film technology in Nazi propaganda, such as the radio dissemination of Hitler’s speeches or the film *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 paean to Nazism. Here, ironically, Benjamin’s differential account of technological structure as specifically tailored to particular communistic politics blinds him to the diverse political possibilities of structurally identical, mass-reproductive technology, whereas Adorno and Horkheimer’s reductive belief in the unity of fascism and capitalism allows them to recognize that the unifying functions of mass-reproductive technology are applicable to diverse forms of politics. Adorno and Horkheimer, unlike Benjamin, recognize the agnostic character of the “new” technologies, the possibility inherent in any technology of being exploited for diverse political purposes. Benjamin gives no credible argument for the claim that a universal technological framework generates *radically* different effects when used by different political systems. It might be possible to argue that reproductive technologies, by their very form, serve the mass ends of a socialist politics and destroy the claims of a conservative politics to an auratic metaphysics. By this argument, the technology of Nazism in destroying the aura would necessarily destroy its project of reproducing an original, auratic German spirit, and this worry is certainly discernible in Heidegger’s critique of technology. But Benjamin does not make this argument. Instead, he leaves it to Adorno and Horkheimer to articulate the systematic, technological, ideological, and economic forces homogenizing the universal and singular, and thereby superseding political differences in singular aesthetic products. This is not to say that Adorno and Horkheimer reject the political significance of the culture industry, for they argue that the culture industry’s privileging of identity constitutes a vehicle for political domination. But they reject the notion that the culture industry’s destruction of difference has effects restricted to either capitalism or fascism.

the film’s potential for representation of the masses themselves” (Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin* [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983], p. 187).

Benjamin's focus on the impact of emerging technological changes on art's quasi-ontological structure justifies his structural analysis of artworks, even as it prevents him from attending to their individual differences.<sup>25</sup> It is not that he denies the existence of individual differences, but that his methodology precludes attention to differences. This approach liberates his work by allowing him to articulate structural conditions applicable to all contingent, politically charged uses of technology, but it restricts his work by precluding any distinction among these technological applications. Benjamin can speak on a general level about technology; however, he cannot explain how individual artworks differ, since he accounts for them in general, structural terms.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in response to Adorno's criticism

25. Benjamin accepts Adorno's critique of the essay as considering only the detail, as in positivism and "Grimm's reverence for small things," rather than sublating "the author's philological interpretation . . . in Hegelian fashion by dialectical materialists"; "[t]he missing theoretical transparency to which you rightly refer is in no way a *necessary* consequence of the philological procedure prevailing in this section" (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, December 9, 1938, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, pp. 587–89). Thus, Adorno identifies a theoretical stance in opposition to a philological concern with the detail. This theoretical stance would not refer only to the systematic operations of the culture industry, but also to the meaning of the technological operations in their relation to the singular details and the critic's stance toward the culture industry. It is obvious now that "the launching of the sound film must be viewed as an industrial action designed to break through the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, which fostered reactions that were hard to control and politically dangerous. An analysis of the sound film would provide a critique of contemporary art mediating dialectically between yours and my view" (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, November 10, 1938, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, pp. 580–81). Benjamin's essay lacks theoretical interpretation and Hegelian "mediation by means of the total social process" and is romantic (*ibid.*, pp. 582–83). Adorno's criticism that Benjamin fails to recognize the totality's mediation of the detail defines a theoretical position. Critique would have to be both practical and theoretical; hence, the concern with the technology of the medium would have to recognize the function and purposes of a systematic intervention. Adorno faults Benjamin (in the *Passagen*) for failing to mediate the "single sensuous moves" by reference to the entire system; "The materialistic determination of cultural characters is possibly only mediated by the *complete process* [*Gesamtprozeß*]" (Letter from Adorno to Benjamin, November 10, 1938, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Briefe und Briefwechsel*, vol. 1, *Theodor W. Adorno/Walter Benjamin: Briefwechsel 1928–1940*, 2nd ed., ed. Henri Lonitz [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995], p. 367). Benjamin fails to interpret the singular details by reference to the total system.

26. "Equality or sameness is a category of cognition; strictly speaking, it is not to be found in sober perception. Perception that is sober in the strictest sense of the word, free of all prejudgment, would always come upon something similar, even in the most extreme case. The kind of prejudice that as a rule accompanies perception without doing any harm can be offensive in exceptional cases" (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, February 23,

that he did not adequately account for the difference between the industrial applications of silent and sound films, Benjamin could explain the different effects of silent and sound films by reference solely to technological changes in the structure of film. Because his account relates to technology *per se*, independently of its use, it limits him to the necessary consequences of technological transformations on the work of art, rather than locally or temporally contingent social controls. The dubious notion that universal ontologies or technologies entail particular ontic commitments, as opponents of Heidegger charge, would mean that a transcendental universal, as in Descartes' fifth meditation, determines singular differences absolutely, that the universal uniquely produces a single product, which would deny the ontological difference. Because technology determines its singular products formally, its relationship to artworks is not merely the abstract, classificatory relationship of universal to singular. But this does not mean that technology determines its singular products *absolutely*, for this would have the untenable, if Adornian, consequence of destroying all differences within a particular technological medium. Technology could not account for differences, although technological transformations would constitute both a necessary and sufficient condition for the identity of all their absolutely undifferentiated singular products. As we have seen, it might still be argued on the level of the specific products that a general technological transformation would have *differential* effects, that it would apply differently to different ideas. For example, the move from radio to film might have different effects on the production of an adventure story than a "romance." But since technologies can neither determine, nor exclude any particular application within their structural frameworks, Benjamin's technological focus should preclude any non-structural account of its singular products.

Benjamin evades ahistorical, metaphysical claims by concentrating on determinate technological changes and their "necessary" consequences, rather than undertaking highly questionable descriptions of present structures of power (of *presence*), whether hidden or transparent, as in Adorno

1939, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 597). Similarity is found in perception, but not equality or sameness, which is a cognitive category. But then Benjamin writes that in the case of Quixote, "[a]s varied as the things he encounters may be, he always perceives the same thing in them. . . . [in Daumier's paintings] the hallucination of equality or sameness. . . . [With Baudelaire] I will already introduce the concept of the immutable in the second part as the immutable *phenomenon* while reserving its definitive character as the concept of the immutable *occurrence* for the third part" (*ibid.*, pp. 597–98).

and Horkheimer. This focus on the necessary consequences of technological changes, independent of use or context, seems to preserve the essentialism of conceptual analysis, for it suggests that the definition of the new technology is adequate to explain its context and functions. But this form of critique inscribes change within its system, for in situating the logic of presence (auratic art) irretrievably in the past, it privileges change over presence or a return to presence. Although Benjamin never abandoned his messianic desire for a return to total presence, his argument is progressive in the sense that it examines the developing seeds, the future possibilities, inherent in the new technology (217–18). This forward-looking spirit allows him to describe modern technology's disruption of presence without falling into the traditional metaphysics of presence. Yet, his inquiry at times replicates Adorno and Horkheimer's Enlightenment metaphysics, such as when he claims to retrieve the lost presence of the auratic artwork or to reveal or bring to presence the unconscious through film. In these moments, Benjamin's progressive argument collapses into a romantic vision of a utopian past in which alienation is abolished and the spectator unified with the total, historical, and spatial presence of the auratic work of art.

In his more radical moments, however, Benjamin restores the differences concealed by universalistic philosophy by reconceiving the universal-singular relationship in technology. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines *techne* as a mode of practical philosophy that produces a singular work by reference to a universal idea. Construed as an attempt to determine the singular absolutely through the universal, this project necessarily fails, for no architect, according to Aristotle, can control the infinitely many individual details of the artwork. These indeterminate details would include not only the "objective" matter and form, but also the site-specific relations of the work. The controversy surrounding Richard Serra's massive Cor-Ten steel artwork, "Tilted Arc," exemplifies this problematic definition. Faced with public demand to remove "Tilted Arc" from its site, Serra argued that "[t]o remove the work is to destroy the work," for he included within its definition the infinitely many details relating its materials to their surroundings and the (anti-)social function of cutting off the view and movement of pedestrians on Federal Plaza in Manhattan. Serra's aesthetics fits the Aristotelian conception of praxis as a transition from universal to singular, which necessarily fails to subsume the singular absolutely to the universal order. In identifying the presence

of the singular work with its identity, Serra places “Tilted Arc” in the category of auratic art.

In Benjamin’s romantic account, auratic art embodies a technological metaphysics of singular, autonomous presence. Auratic art is haunted by a spectral presence, with a history, a cult value, a localized, social context, a mystical secret. The original, non-commodified work is unique, individual, concrete (yet spectral) and ever-changing; it is neither ahistorical nor identified uniformly throughout time. The Greek household gods were auratic in that they were specific to a people or even to a particular temple, and as the history of the people and the temple changed, the gods’ identity changed as well—unlike the abstract, universal Christian God.<sup>27</sup> In a temple where the gods indwell, the viewer, as a proper member of the local cult, is situated with the gods. A particular, historically determined web of social relations forms the identity of the auratic work, for the auratic work *is* its history and social relations. Removing it from this web of relations destroys its identity. Therefore, there can be no exhaustive account of the auratic artwork in terms of its intrinsic form and materiality or rationality. If auratic art cannot be defined materially, it also cannot be defined rationally, for its history is irreducibly singular and its identity evolving.

Benjamin’s account of mechanical reproduction defines itself by destroying the irreducible metaphysical presence of these individual, socially and historically situated, site-specific works. The point is not that the site has nothing to do with the new, individual, mechanically produced works, but that there is no universal-singular dichotomy, for *techne*’s redefinition as a *generalized* mode of production derived from universal ideas effaces the universal-singular schema. Whereas Aristotelian *techne* translates universal ideas into singular artworks, technical reproduction destroys the notion of singularity or originality. Thus, for example, in photography, the negative is not itself the artwork, but the source of copies that do not look like the negative. As a copy, the reproduced artwork is mimetic, but there is no original, universal model from which it is derived, and it is no unique, singular product. Rather than beginning with an original or positive presence (being), as in Hegel’s *Logic*, this negative dialectical logic begins with the negative and moves through a process of opposition to the copy; yet, the copy does not sublimate differences,

27. The universalism of the Romans in Virgil’s *Aeneid* can be read as originating in Aeneas’ removal of the household gods from Troy, for this abstracts them from the particular context proper to them, the context which gave them their particular identity.



reconcile oppositions, or return us to an original presence, for no auratic “here and now . . . [no] unique existence in the place where it is” (220) is available for the technology of mechanical reproduction; or at least, mechanical reproduction “in all cases devalues its here and now” (221), in that nothing specific to the copy is essential to the artwork. Thus, in photographic prints, for which no original exists, there can be no return to an original presence. Benjamin’s conception of the reproductive process retains the implicit unities of opposition (the equal opposite, the negative, the two-valued, bifurcated world of oppositional logic) and resemblance (the copy), but it leaves no hope of restoring the original “here and now” of presence.<sup>28</sup> What is destroyed by the new technologies is precisely the here and now of the auratic or site-specific work.

The moviegoer’s ideological experience, the sense of being plunged into the “real” world of the film, depends on the technology’s function of concealing its own artifice, yet there is no reality against which this concealment might be measured. The film actor no longer proclaims his artificiality (to use Benjamin’s gender-specific language); unlike the stage actor, he no longer proclaims that he is playing a role requiring an imaginative construction of a world in which his actions could be fit. Because “the actor represents himself [*Darsteller . . . sich selbst darstellt*] to the public through the camera” (229), his presence, as a re-presentation, conceals its ineffaceable distance from the original. The magnified, two-dimensional presentation of the actors neither presents itself as nature, nor brings the audience into relation with the actors. Both are conscious that the other is forever out of reach. But this consciousness does not somehow efface the distance separating the public from the actor, as in Hegel. The public is never immediately present to the actor, or vice versa, for the relation is in each case mediated by the camera and mechanical equipment. The mechanical character of the film’s production denatures the human being, destroying his original presence. The actor feels himself—his presence—estranged, alienated, before the camera; he cannot identify with his

28. Here I rely on the schema of Gilles Deleuze’s fourfold root of representation (identity, opposition, resemblance, and analogy) in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). David Roberts asserts that “Benjamin celebrated the sense of the same released by mass production,” which Roberts describes as “the anti-aesthetic ‘experience’ appropriate to the destruction of natural beauty” (Roberts, “On Aura and an Ecological Aesthetics of Nature,” in Fischer, ed., *With the Sharpened Axe of Reason*, p. 59).

role (231), since his performance unfolds in brief, discontinuous moments before a camera crew and equipment. The actor offers his whole soul to a market that is beyond his reach (231). Technology magnifies the distance between the actor and the public, even as it appears to collapse it, for films, unlike plays, interpose a succession of mechanical contrivances between the actor and the public. This technological apparatus cannot be dispensed with in order to effect a total presence. The technology of mass reproduction destroys the uniqueness of the artwork, the presence of its here and now (229), the stage of Hegelian sense certainty, its spatio-temporal singularity, and its social-historical context. There is no longer the possibility of recapturing an object's immediate presence, for technology destroys the sphere in which the authenticity or truth of a work is possible.

The audience's dilemma is the inverse of the actor's, in that it identifies not with the actor, the individual nature beyond its reach, but with the camera, the artificial medium (228). In watching a filming, the artificiality of the process is inescapable, for the equipment is always in evidence, except from the camera's perspective. The film itself conceals its artifice through its manifest artificiality, its rapid succession of static images, magnified and projected on a two-dimensional screen in a darkened theater. The audience is given a representation of a representation (*Darstellung*), not the "original" or even the original representer (*Darsteller*), for the actor appears to the audience only in the medium of the film. Therefore, the audience *necessarily* fails to identify with the actor. This means that what is the exception for Adorno and Horkheimer is the technological rule for Benjamin. It would be fruitless for the culture industry to reject an actress, such as Greta Garbo,<sup>29</sup> on the grounds that she is unapproachable, because

29. The exclusion of Garbo's "resistant physiognomy" is a primary example (146). The claim that Greta Garbo did not sufficiently conform to the culture industry to be accepted by it was credible at the time that "The Culture Industry" was written, but it does not harmonize very well with her biography. The "tragic Garbo" appeared in twenty-eight films between 1922 and 1941, she was under contract to MGM for most of that period, she starred in a number of high-grossing, big-budget films, she was nominated for several Oscars (although she did not win, except for a special Oscar in 1954), she appeared in comedies and as a "modern woman," and she was often featured in the popular film magazines. After 1941, her film projects were never completed, and there were reports that she was no longer a box-office draw. However, she continued to receive film offers, including one that she refused in 1952. Her history of difficult contract negotiations, complaints about bad scripts, inability to complete a film after 1941, and later "unapproachability" would support the claim of "The Culture Industry," but this argument is tenuous at best, especially

film technology necessarily destroys the actor's immediate presence. What appears in the culture industry's "girl next door" is the artificial phoniness of "personality," not the person's nature, for the aura shrivels up before the camera (231).<sup>30</sup> In the modern age, art's nature as reproducible on the mass scale means that its "immediate presence" is already a repetition, an artificial nature with no original appearance behind it, and therefore no unique identity. Art is defined as irrecoverable loss and alienation of presence, which means that the aims of metaphysics cannot be attained through art.

Thus, Benjamin rules out the recovery of presence by totalizing the technological mediation. Reproductive technology destroys the possibility of producing an original presence, because the technological mediation penetrates into the work itself and is therefore ineliminable from the spectator's relation to the artwork. The auratic artwork's disappearance is accompanied by a vanishing of the distance between technology and art, particularly in film.

[I]n the film studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] that its pure aspect freed from the foreign body [*Fremdkörper*] of equipment is the result of a particular procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality [*Realität*] here has become the most artificial [*künstlichsten*] and the sight of immediate actuality has become a blue flower [*blauen Blume*, the symbol of romanticism] in the land of technology. (233)

For Benjamin, the image of simple, natural presence in technology is the very height of artificiality, because it marks the complete unification of technology and reality; technology so thoroughly permeates "reality" that it seems to disappear. As a result, in films, the maximally mediated presence of the scene to the spectator appears as an *immediate*, totally exposed presence. In exhibiting the artificiality of the claim to represent reality, then, Benjamin rejects the idea of a return to Enlightenment presence or transparency, although his argument contains elements of this return. As

because it was quite rare for lead actresses to continue receiving major roles after their late thirties. The point of assessing the accuracy of their specific claims is that if their argument depends on or is derived from them, then it falls apart if these specific claims are wrong.

30. By contrast, Adorno argues that "if there is an auratic character," it would most properly apply to film (Letter from Adorno to Benjamin, March 18, 1936, in Adorno, *Briefe und Briefwechsel*, p. 172).

Atget's pictures of the empty streets of Paris suggest, the new technologies enact the irrevocable, symbolic murder of individual presence.<sup>31</sup>

This account of technology's destruction of auratic presence constitutes Benjamin's destruction of metaphysics *per se*, yet the technology of mass reproduction itself establishes a transformed metaphysics. Benjamin problematizes the metaphysical notion of presence by arguing that technical reproduction alienates auratic art's original, spectral presence, but his account of technical reproducibility offers a mechanical metaphysics of presence in place of a pre-technical metaphysics. This technological metaphysics is evident in his accounts of the oppositions and resemblances of the reproductive process, the idea of the in-itself of a nature cut off by the machine's interposition between nature and spectator, and the faux immediacy of a highly organized, impersonal artifice posing as nature, which replaces the unattainable ideal of an unmediated nature. According to Benjamin, "it is an other nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye" (236). The camera constructs the beyond of a supernature or meta-physics ineluctably separated from the experiential world. The technological medium necessarily distances the spectator from the world given to the camera. This account is metaphysical insofar as it constructs a metaphysical other nature, presupposes the past experience of original presence, destroyed by historical-technological changes, and leaves open the possibility of an everyday experience of original presence, though not in art. Yet, Benjamin does not contrast the image of a non-natural, technological art with a natural art, for this approach might negatively resuscitate a metaphysics of truth as an unveiling of, or a correspondence with, a pure nature. He refuses to situate film within the sphere of true and false nature, for he argues that there is no original nature to be revealed or concealed by it.

In destroying this metaphysics of auratic presence, technology functions simultaneously to construct a new, metaphysical or ontotheological

31. Atget's photos play this role for Benjamin, but as Knizek points out, this is not an effect of the new technology, for the technology did not entail that one take pictures of empty streets, except, of course, at a time in which the exposure length was too long to capture individual motion without blurring. An individual photographer taking photographs of empty streets would not seem to alter the nature of photography or the people themselves. If changes in forms of reproduction are themselves responsible for the loss of aura, then all particular uses of the new technologies would have the same effect on aura. Pictures of crowded streets would have the same effect, insofar as the technological change is supposed to transform the artwork, not the technology's particular applications.

world of revolutionary possibilities. Technology expands the possibilities of knowledge beyond all possible human experience, for the camera, as a prosthesis, a supplement to human vision, substitutes an unconscious view for a conscious view. Through close-ups of small details and slow-motion photography, films extend the “world” in space and time (236), showing what is invisible to ordinary perception. Feuerbach makes this very point with respect to the microscope and the telescope in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. By opening to consciousness previously unknowable worlds, absolutely different in scale, the microscope and telescope place the human being in the position of God, realizing divine omniscience, at least in the totality of science for the human species over time.<sup>32</sup> This process constitutes an anthropological, articulated universality, an absolutely determinative ontotheology, for

[t]he most perfect, and hence divine, sensuous knowledge is indeed nothing other than the most sensuous knowledge that knows the most minute objects and the least noticeable details, that knows the hair on man’s head not by grasping it indiscriminately in one lock but by counting them, thus knowing them all, hair by hair. “God is therefore the all-knowing,” says St. Thomas Aquinas, “because he knows the most particular things.” But this divine knowledge, which is only an imaginary conception and a fantasy in theology, became rational and real knowledge in the knowledge of the natural sciences gained through the telescope and microscope.<sup>33</sup>

Through its infinitely grand or minute powers of inspection, technology effects the otherwise unattainable ontotheological vision of determining the universal by reference to the infinite totality of singulars.

The camera in Benjamin is structurally analogous to the microscope and telescope in Feuerbach, for it extends apperception beyond the limits of experience, opening up the unconscious world to consciousness. Technology “reveals entirely new structural formations of the material” and extends “insight into the necessities by which our existence [*Dasein*] is ruled” (236). Technology cancels itself out by its total immersion in reality; the technological processes of film determine the singular absolutely, and in so doing, efface themselves, for they are in everything and therefore are inseparable from their singular products. The technological difference

32. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1986), sect. 13, pp. 16–17.

33. *Ibid.*

is asserted only for the sake of its abolition. The film's highly artificial processes produce an "immediate, natural presence." This means that film's destruction of presence reinstalls more firmly a controlled, generic presence.

Nevertheless, Benjamin classifies this metaphysical subjection as liberation from metaphysical tyranny. He argues that film frees the subject from unconscious, dominating influences, for its "unconscious optics" reveal an unconscious world and the unconscious forces that govern our existence (236–37). We were "locked up hopelessly" in factories, taverns, city streets, and "[t]hen came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second" (236). Benjamin thus regards modern technology optimistically, in Kantian terms, as a process of enlightenment, but Kant would reject the notion that accepting the leading strings of technology constitutes liberation. For Benjamin, technology takes the place of Kantian nature in "emancipat[ing] [human beings] from alien guidance."<sup>34</sup>

This conception of technology is ontotheological, a messianic metaphysics of possibility, for Benjamin assigns the new film technology the transparent, all-knowing, articulated universality of Feuerbach's God. While painting gives a picture of the whole and film

consists of multiply fragmented [pictures]... assembled according to a new law, ... for contemporary man the representation of reality [*Realität*] by the film is incomparably more meaningful than that of the painter, because it guarantees the aspect of actuality free of mechanical equipment, which it is justified to demand from the artwork, precisely on the ground of its thoroughgoing permeation of actuality with mechanical equipment [as in surgery]. (234)

Thus, the cameraman's technology mediates his relation to "reality" in so complete a fashion as to be everywhere and therefore nowhere. As Feuerbach asks, "if we were once to have no more objects and no world apart

34. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 54. Kant calls dogmas and formulas "those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) of his natural endowments... the ball and chain of his permanent immaturity" (*ibid.*, pp. 54–55) and later questions Julien Offray de Lamettrie's mechanical understanding of human beings in *L'homme machine* (1748) as dismissing the possibility of human liberation (*ibid.*, p. 60). Thus, Kant would regard Benjamin's hope of technology liberating human beings as a further subjection of human beings to mechanical leading strings.

from God, so would we also have no more God . . . apart from the world?”<sup>35</sup> But if, in “The Work of Art” essay, Benjamin preserves this implicitly ontotheological notion of a liberatory enlightenment, an extension of consciousness to hitherto unknown domains through the revolutionary medium of film, he also stresses technology’s problematic character and the impossibility of a return to original, auratic presence, unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, who assume the possibility of solution.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Benjamin marks technological artificiality without relying implicitly on an external standard of reality against which the artwork is judged as false or ideological. It is not a question of installing truth criteria within art or determining the nature underlying art, as in “The Culture Industry,” for Benjamin’s work is an account of technological transformation rather than “reality.” This account sets nature against technology only in reference to an irretrievable, past art. Therefore, art’s future possibilities do not include a return to presence. Benjamin’s logical and technological transformations destroy the notion of a return to presence. Art’s altered structure eliminates the notion of the original and, hence, the possibility of a return to original presence in art. It also eliminates the binary logic behind the presence-absence opposition, although it does so by locating a metaphysics within the auratic side of a binary opposition between cult and exhibition value (224–25). Whereas Adorno and Horkheimer judge technology as ideology by reference to truth and reality, Benjamin judges presence and reality only as they appear in art, according to their technological determinants. Benjamin accepts the Enlightenment assumptions of ideology critique in claiming that films can reveal the unconscious’s hidden presence. But his account of film’s immersion in the detail disrupts this traditional logic by generating an appearance of immediacy from the most artificial processes. There can be no return to presence, but there is a kind of *Aufhebung* of presence in Benjamin’s depiction of film. Even as the technical reproduction negates presence, the camera shot (*Aufnahme*) literally takes up (*nimmt auf*) the presence of the actors and recaptures it in a much more totalizing universality than the auratic artwork, for none of the details can escape the camera’s fragmentary reproduction of its highly artificial reality. In place of the metaphysical question of nature or reality,

35. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, sect. 14, pp. 20–21.

36. Benjamin later criticizes the concept of progress in his reply to Adorno’s rejection of the Baudelaire *Passagen* work (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, December 10, 1938, in Adorno, *Briefe und Briefwechsel*, p. 385).



then, there is “[t]he primary question—whether the total character of art has not transformed itself through the invention of photography” (227). Benjamin turns the discussion away from the metaphysics of presence to the question of technology by differentiating between a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical technology. Thus, he vests his hope for liberation in the multifaceted capacities of technology, rather than in an escape from industrial-technological functions.

### III. Conclusion

Benjamin rethinks the ontological-ontic, universal-singular hierarchies characteristic of metaphysics by transforming the concept of technology, whereas Adorno and Horkheimer preserve metaphysics precisely in problematizing the universal-singular relation and identifying the ideological character of the culture industry. Adorno’s work is not always metaphysical in this way. In *Negative Dialectics*, he gives a sustained critique of the philosophy of presence, although he preserves a metaphysical terminology and division.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in “The Culture Industry,” amidst an overwhelmingly

37. There is a general consensus that Adorno’s collaboration with Horkheimer deracinated Adorno’s work. Just as Horkheimer repeatedly altered and excised portions of Benjamin’s submissions for political reasons (to maintain the Institute’s affiliation with Columbia University in New York City, but also earlier), he exercised a conservative philosophical influence on Adorno. As Benjamin’s unforgiving editor at the *Zeitschrift* in the 1930s, Adorno directly affected Benjamin’s work. For example, referring to the Baudelaire manuscript, Benjamin wrote to Adorno, “I would be happy if no drastic changes (*pour tout dire*: deletions) were destined for it” (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, August 6, 1939, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 612). Benjamin met Adorno in a summer course in Frankfurt in 1923. Adorno was responsible for Benjamin’s relation to the Institute for Social Research, which supported him, at least in part, throughout the 1930s. However, it is disputed whether Adorno or Horkheimer was more antipathetic to Benjamin’s work. By Julian Roberts’s account, Benjamin always maintained friendly if formal relations with Horkheimer, who published a great deal of his work, provided him a good wage when no journals or newspapers were publishing his work, and perhaps even put in a good word on Benjamin’s failed *Habilitationsthesis* with Hans Cornelius, whereas Adorno was critical of Benjamin’s work throughout the 1930s, rejected his work as editor of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, and did not invite him to his wedding in 1937. As Roberts argues, Adorno would write long letters critical of Benjamin’s work and Benjamin would reply very tersely, corresponding indirectly, through Gretel Karplus, and delaying in providing Adorno copies of his work, most notably “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility” (Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, pp. 67–75). Indeed, Benjamin apologized to Adorno for not sending him a copy of “The Work of Art” earlier (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, February 27, 1936, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 523), and many of Benjamin’s letters to Adorno were short. However, this account is one-sided, for

metaphysical account, Adorno and Horkheimer anticipate a deconstructive move in arguing that the culture industry is an ideological machine substituting an artificial, false nature posing as nature for “nature” itself (whether internal or external), but in “all mass culture under monopoly . . . its skeleton, the framework [*Gerippe*, skeleton] conceived and fabricated by mass culture, begins to mark itself” (121). Thus, “The Culture Industry” offers the specter of occasional aporetic moments within a traditional, oppositional framework that privileges a metaphysics in replicating the culture industry’s presence, binary logic, homogenization of universal and singular, and violence to singularity. Benjamin accepts certain elements of this metaphysics in articulating the metaphysical presence of auratic art, setting up a binary division between the modern artwork and auratic art’s true, natural, non-alienated presence, and positing a metaphysics of

some of Benjamin’s letters to Adorno were actually quite long (for example, nos. 307, 310, and 332, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*), and Roberts notes that Adorno had apparently asked Horkheimer in 1932 to give Benjamin another chance for his *Habilitation*, only to be refused (Adorno, *Text und Kritik*, cited in Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 232n101). Bernd Witte differs in large measure from Roberts in blaming Horkheimer, rather than Adorno, for his extensive, politically motivated censoring of Benjamin’s work (Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. James Rolleston [Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1991], p. 156), as well as his role in advising Cornelius to reject Benjamin’s *Habilitationstheisis* (ibid., p. 86). Witte traces Benjamin’s “always somewhat strained” relations with the Frankfurt School to Horkheimer’s “secret sense of guilt at having participated, without Benjamin’s knowledge, in the wrecking of his academic career” (ibid.) and argues that Benjamin’s relationship with Adorno had become closer over the years. “[D]uring the years of exile Benjamin’s friendship with Adorno, nourished by the latter’s help in practical matters, above all in financial dealings with the directors of the institute, and by his involvement in theoretical questions, had deepened to the point where for a time he was Benjamin’s only serious intellectual counterpart” (ibid., p. 156). There is the *profession* of a close relationship in their correspondence. Their letters prior to October 1936, when Adorno stayed with Benjamin in Paris, are addressed to “Lieber Herr Wiesengrund” and “Lieber Herr Benjamin,” whereas Adorno’s October 15, 1936, letter begins “Lieber Walter” and ends “Ihr Teddie,” and all subsequent letters between Adorno and Benjamin have this form of greetings and salutations, except for the final letter from Benjamin, which apologizes at the end, “[p]lease excuse the painfully complete signature; it is required” by the fascist authorities (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, August 2, 1940, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 639). In the index of correspondents at the end of *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, edited by Adorno and Scholem, it says “[a]n intense friendship with WB evolved from their acquaintance in 1923. They spent a lot of time together in Paris and San Remo during the emigration” (ibid., p. 641). But this was late to develop, and prior to Benjamin’s death, Adorno continued to criticize many aspects of Benjamin’s writings, preventing some work from being published.

technology in its constructing a world beyond nature. Yet, he undermines this oppositional Enlightenment logic, together with its metaphysics of presence, by spectralizing presence, situating it irretrievably in the past, circumventing the question of a true description of reality, and determining art as a dynamic process rather than a fixed substance or object originating in a distinct, prior universal idea. Benjamin describes the emergence of technical reproducibility as radically, irreversibly substituting a highly abstracted, de-individualizing “unnatural” technology for the immediate, mystical, spiritual, living presence, and social-historical context of nature and “natural” art.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Benjamin refuses a metaphysical return by asserting a radical break between modern and pre-modern art, Adorno and Horkheimer stress the culture industry’s continuity with the Enlightenment project, even as they construct an artificial historical division *within* the Enlightenment between the relative truth and freedom of bourgeois art and the false totality of industrial art. Benjamin argues that technology revolutionizes the “nature” of the work of art by destroying its original mystical character as immediate, contextual, physical-spiritual presence, while Adorno and Horkheimer contend that the technological and political changes occasioned by the culture industry constitute, literally, more of the *same*, perfecting and totalizing certain Enlightenment tendencies immanent already within the bourgeois work of art (134) and further mystifying by abstraction the already ritualistic and mystical-mythical character of “pre-modern” art. Thus, in Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer, despite their explicit recognition that the overcoming of metaphysics is a necessary condition for the success of their projects and their discernible steps toward a deconstruction of metaphysics, the primary criteria against which they measure art remain traditional notions of truth, reality, and presence. Nor are these metaphysical schemata abandoned by later critical theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, or even the Adorno of *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. This distinguishes the aesthetics of critical theory from the deconstructive genealogies of Jacques Derrida’s *Truth in Painting* or Michel Foucault’s “Las Meninas.” Foucauldian and Derridean

38. Benjamin replaces the metaphysical notion of aura with the trace. “[M]y first act after my return was to seek out a most important passage in Poe for my construct of the detective story as deriving from the obliteration or fixation of the traces of the individual in the big-city crowd. . . . The concept of the trace will find its philosophical determination in opposition to the concept of aura” (Letter from Benjamin to Adorno, December 9, 1938, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, p. 586).

aesthetics function by discursively interrogating the problematic notions of truth, reality, and presence in works of art and deconstructing the limits and essences thought constitutive of the artwork. It could be argued that this inquiry continues to assume, and indeed to privilege, the fundamental concepts of metaphysics by positing their historical identity and centering the text on them. Yet, the aporetics of metaphysical destructuring entail precisely that the metaphysical schema of Frankfurt School aesthetics be retrieved transformatively.

# *How Should Philosophy Be Clear? Loaded Clarity, Default Clarity, and Adorno*

Nicholas Joll

Part of the point of this article is to support the following claim by Adorno: “Rarely has anyone laid out a theory of philosophical clarity; instead, the concept of clarity has been used as though it were self-evident.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, and again with Adorno, I shall argue for what I call the “loadedness thesis”: the thesis that philosophical conceptions of clarity are pervasively, and perhaps inevitably, philosophically partisan (section one). Yet I shall proceed to argue for a conception of clarity nonetheless (section two). Such clarity I take as “default clarity,” in that, while there could be reason to eschew it, the burden of proof lies on those who would. That thought is *not* Adornian. But I shall consider Adorno as an attempt to discharge that burden of proof (section three).

As the quotation from Adorno admits, there have been *some* treatments of philosophical clarity. Those treatments are bounded on two sides. Some treatments are too broad to be counted as focused on clarity, while others are too narrow. The broad work, present in many major philosophers (Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, et al.), combines considerations of clarity with those of style, meaning, or method. The narrow material includes work on vagueness, some of which treats logic and/or concepts, some ontological or “de re” vagueness. Other work on vagueness restricts itself to ethics, philosophy of mind, or jurisprudence. Further work restricts itself to the analysis of ideas about clarity advanced by particular philosophers. But

1. Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 102. Subsequent references to Adorno’s *Hegel* will be documented parenthetically using *H* followed by the page number.

there is work that takes clarity in general as its focus. I shall employ some of that work.<sup>2</sup>

### ***I. Loaded Clarity***

I argue the loadedness thesis via some accusations—“accusations” because debate in this area is rare—exchanged across the Analytical-Continental divide. More specifically, I treat several types of such accusation; and I do so not to augment insults, but in order to identify presuppositions of various stances toward clarity. It is true that the usual or crude version of the Analytical-Continental distinction is at best inchoate and at worst incoherent.<sup>3</sup> Yet my account will disclose several rough generalizations that, while mainly unoriginal, make more sense—*enough* sense, for my purposes—of the distinction.

I start with the Analytical accusation that some Continental discourse amounts to undue esotericism or even willful obscurantism.<sup>4</sup> Certainly Continental philosophy tends to use language more inventively than Analytical philosophy. Examples are: Hegel’s idiosyncratic style; Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms; Heideggerian neologism, hyphenation, and poetry; Derridian wordplay, parallel columns, etc.; and the eclecticism of texts by Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>5</sup> Such linguistic novelty extends to innovation in argumentation or persuasion. Thus, correspondingly: Hegel’s dialectic;

2. Adorno himself mentions Alfred North Whitehead’s *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1942) (*H* 102). Whitehead concentrates on Descartes but argues that Cartesian clarity presupposes that our fundamental relation to the world is epistemic (pp. 225–26). That view echoes Heidegger (cf. note 40 below).

3. Here one may see: Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), p. 32; Dagfinn Føllesdal, “Analytic Philosophy: What is it and why should one engage in it?” in *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Hans-Johann Glock (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 3; Neil Levy, “Analytic and Continental Philosophy: Explaining the Differences,” *Metaphilosophy* 24, no. 3 (2003): 284–304; Bernard Williams, “Contemporary Philosophy: A Second Look,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 25–37.

4. Thus Karl Popper’s charge of charlatanry against Hegel, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 28. Thus, too, the infamous allegation, by Quine et al., that “M. Derrida’s work does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigour,” in Jacques Derrida, *Points...: Interviews, 1974–1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 420.

5. Still, some philosophical thinkers have “shunn[ed] normal modes of argument” since at least the time of the Reformation. See Stanley Cavell, “Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy,” in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 219. One may note also—for one thing—Plato’s use of myth.

Kierkegaard's advocacy of the so-called subjective point of view; the attempt to escape the connotations of traditional philosophical terms in early Heidegger, and the later Heidegger's call for a special type of *Denken*; Derridian deconstruction; and Deleuze's conception of "nomadic" thought.

The motivations for such linguistic and argumentative innovations are as various as the innovations themselves. The motivations include claims about the inherent stupidity or contemporary inappropriateness of philosophical systems (Nietzsche, Adorno), the distortion of ethical thinking by the objective attitude (Kierkegaard), the infiltration of ordinary language by metaphysics (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida), and the nature of the concept (Adorno, Deleuze).<sup>6</sup> Also, many Continentals are suspicious of reason, or of what passes for reason. Witness Critical Theory on instrumental rationality, Heidegger on "logistics" and on philosophy as metaphysics or "ontotheology," Kierkegaard, again, on the objective attitude, and Derrida on "logocentrism." Such suspicions or contestations sometimes extend to the authority or scope of logic (Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" being a notable example), even if attempts wholly to revoke logic are rare. The moral is as follows. It begs crucial philosophical questions simply to damn linguistic and argumentative innovations as obscure.<sup>7</sup>

A distinguishable accusation often leveled at Continental philosophers—distinguishable from the charge of obscurantism—is the allegation of imprecision.<sup>8</sup> The model of precision here may be classical conditions:

6. Section three discusses some of the Adornian views mentioned here. On Heidegger and Derrida, see David Wood, "Style and Strategy at the Limits of Philosophy," *The Monist* 63, no. 4 (1980): 494–511. Wood comes to argue as follows. "For many a philosopher, the problematic status of language is not confined to a localizable philosophical topic, but invades the expressive medium of philosophy itself. . . . If this story is plausible, those who make a habit of impatience with continental philosophy might begin to consider that very often a difficult style is not a gratuitous disregarding of a more simply stateable truth, not a veil covering the shame of confusion, but a careful, serious philosophical choice" (ibid., p. 495).

7. To have justifications for one's innovations is not, then, what Popper called "reinforced dogmatism" (*The Open Society*, p. 40 and passim). Rather, a justification deserves its name to the extent that it removes dogmatism. Still, some Continental thinkers have employed methodical or first principles as "trap-doors" to dispose of others' positions. See William R. Schroeder, "Afterword" to *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, ed. Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

8. Hilary Putnam reports a view likening criticizing deconstruction with boxing a fog. See his *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992), p. 109.



conditions singly necessary and jointly sufficient for their objects.<sup>9</sup> However, Continental philosophers often do not just eschew but *reject* classical conditions. History, or “historicity,” is important here. Analytical philosophers may take themselves to be treating “some ahistorical ‘formal’ structures,”<sup>10</sup> but that self-understanding may be thought naïve.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, who famously indicted philosophers’ “lack of any historical sense,” held that “only that which has no history is definable.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, emphasis on the philosophical importance of history is another plausible if rough criterion of Continental philosophy. Such emphasis goes back to Herder’s “metacritique” of Kant and extends to Hegel and to all of the following: Adorno, the late Husserl, Heidegger (especially later Heidegger), Gadamer, and Foucault. That said, the general applicability of classical conditions has become a substantive issue within Analytical thought.<sup>13</sup>

There will be such a thing as imprecision whatever the truth about classical conditions. But charges of imprecision encounter other complications too. When contemplating the varieties of human life in the first book of the *Ethics*, Aristotle saw that different subject matters allow of different

9. Michael Bishop, “The Possibility of Conceptual Clarity in Philosophy,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1992): 267–77.

10. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 21.

11. Levy, “Analytic and Continental Philosophy,” p. 289; Franca D’Agostini, “From a Continental Point of View: The Role of Logic in the Analytic-Continental Divide,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9, no. 3 (2001): 354.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 45, and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 57, respectively.

13. The influence of Wittgenstein is important here. See his *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), sects. 67–69 and *passim*. Bishop (“The Possibility of Conceptual Clarity,” sect. 2) augments Wittgensteinian considerations with a further argument and with psychological data, and extends the attack on classical conditions with argument against what he calls “conceptual explication.” Mark Johnson, in *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), chs. 4 and 8, cites other empirical work. On the other hand, there are views one might call neo-classical. These include the so-called epistemic theory of vagueness, which insists that we are ignorant of the determinate boundaries of our concepts. See Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness* (New York: Routledge, 1996), and compare Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988), p. 116: “Every concept that lays claim to any rigor whatsoever implies the alternative of ‘all or nothing’.” Indeed, some Analytical philosophers would *replace* everyday terms or concepts with classically defined ones. For example, there is the idea that we should replace “folk-psychological” terms with notions that are more determinate.

degrees of precision. There is also the question of the *value* of precision. Precision can involve technicality and hence can make texts less accessible to most audiences. Moreover, “clarity, rigor, and argumentation”<sup>14</sup> are not the only philosophical ideals, or at least that is so if we figure clarity as primarily a property of propositions; and, perhaps, propositions themselves are not the primary business or vehicle of philosophy. Philosophy has been construed as “a way of seeing,”<sup>15</sup> or as consisting “in relearning to look at the world,”<sup>16</sup> or as the generation of ever new perspectives.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively or additionally, philosophy may be thought to aim at transformation or—more strongly—at emancipation.

Now emancipatory intent is a notable feature of those philosophies grouped together as “Continental,” whether that which is to be emancipated is the mind or the self, one’s relations to others, one’s relation to the world, or that world itself, and whether the emancipation is from superstition, prejudice, false values, and ideology, or from various forms of unfreedom or domination. One may cite: the emancipatory goals definitive of Critical Theory; the philosophical Marxism of Lukács, Sartre, and others; Nietzsche’s call for the self-realization of “free spirits” and the transvaluation of values; Heidegger’s attempt to encourage a new and redemptive relation to *das Sein*; Foucault’s interest in exposing domination; and Derrida’s presentation of deconstruction as ethical and political.<sup>18</sup> Indeed,

14. Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1, *The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), p. xiii.

15. William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1978), p. 60. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 122.

16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xx.

17. See Levy, “Analytic and Continental Philosophy,” p. 201, on Deleuze, Lyotard, and Foucault.

18. On Critical Theory, see Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 188–243. On Foucault, one might see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), lecture 10. For Derrida, see his “Force of Law,” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1982), particularly p. 14. Continental philosophy may owe its focus on emancipation to the following. Such philosophy consists, to a considerable degree, and often self-consciously, of reactions to the Enlightenment and to the nihilism which that project or its failure can seem to threaten. See Critchley, *Continental Philosophy*, and Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (London: Routledge, 2003).

emancipatory intent, together with a stress on the difficulty of escaping prevalent ideas or outlooks, often motivates linguistic and argumentative innovation. The point holds in an attenuated fashion even for philosophies that, particularly pessimistic about the present prospects of emancipation, urge a kind of resistance instead (Lyotard, Foucault, and perhaps Adorno). Further, emancipatory intent can underlie (counter-)accusations that Analytical philosophers split hairs and so trivialize philosophy.<sup>19</sup> A more extreme charge has it that, by dint of being unconcerned with emancipation or even somehow complicit with pernicious states of affairs, Analytical philosophy is reactionary.<sup>20</sup>

In sum: style and argumentative procedure; the nature, possibility, and value of precision; the nature of philosophy; and the state of the world—all of this can and has been put at issue by charges of unclarity. Plausibly, such topics are substantive points of disagreement *between* Analytical and Continental philosophy. Consequently, damning a philosophical discourse as unclear very likely involves taking sides on at least one of the aforementioned topics. Moreover, seemingly any conception of clarity *must* be partisan about at least some of the topics. A conception of philosophical clarity that said or implied nothing about precision, the nature of argument or demonstration, or the task of philosophy, would be strange.

## II. *Default Clarity*

The loadedness of conceptions of clarity complicates but does not foreclose an answer to the question of how philosophy should be clear. There may be a desirable discursive clarity that is loaded only *minimally*, which is to say, beholden only to assumptions not too difficult to discharge. Now just because such a notion of clarity remains loaded, there *may* be philosophical reason to eschew it. However, since the notion is loaded only minimally, *the justificatory burden lies with those who would eschew such*

19. “I have heard fans of Continental philosophy be obnoxious about the ‘mere logic-chopping’ with which their analytic colleagues waste students’ time and dehydrate their minds” (Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982], p. 225). “[A]n ‘analytic’ philosopher [can earn] this title by grinding away at the consequences of this or that particular proposition, as if filing a legal brief” (Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique*, pp. 59–60).

20. Material in Adorno, we shall see, illustrates the stronger charge. So does material in Marcuse and Heidegger. I should add that some Analytical philosophers have seen philosophy as emancipatory—and emancipatory not just of the intellectual’s mind but, as with the Vienna Circle and especially perhaps with Otto Neurath, more generally.

*clarity*. Thus the clarity at issue is no more than, yet also no less than, a *default*. I shall expand upon that point about the “default” status of the clarity that I advocate. First, however, I present the *content* of that default clarity.

Default clarity as I construe it has four parts: (a) explication of terms; (b) rigor; (c) precision; (d) accessibility. I understand those parts or notions as follows. *Terminological explication* enjoins the provision of a sense (at least a provisional sense) for any important yet untransparent term. *Rigor* is twofold. On the one hand, it enjoins hypotaxis, which is to say, a distinction between thesis and argument and also between distinguishable argumentative steps. On the other hand, rigor is a matter of logically valid argument. My talk of *precision* intends: (1) exactness as against vagueness; (2) specificity as against generality; (3) univocity as against ambiguity. *Accessibility* is the absence both of technicality and of esotericism. Those notions—technicality and esotericism—overlap one another. Together, they encompass the use of such devices as these: terms of art (including logical notation); foreign terms; puzzling juxtapositions; quasi- or semi-poetic language; strange formatting; very long sentences; and extreme concision.

The foregoing requires some further specification. Take rigor first. The requirement of hypotaxis could be taken to require the elimination of enthymemes (that is, of suppressed or implicit premises). Yet what I mean to enjoin is only the *minimizing* of *significant* enthymemes. It may be that one cannot make one’s presuppositions fully explicit. Nor is there much point in belaboring the obvious—even if what counts as obvious depends on audience and thereby is connected with the notion of accessibility. Nor do I require an *absolute* separation of thesis from argument—a separation that this article itself performs only partially. As to precision, we should learn from Aristotle (or Wittgenstein<sup>21</sup>) that circumstances can make inappropriate some degrees (or types) of specificity or exactness. Thus, I enjoin exactness, specificity, and univocity *to the degree that* they aid rigor and terminological explication. Accessibility presents a similar case. For as I shall come to elaborate, I do not urge the total eschewal of technicality and esotericism.

That default clarity is somewhat indeterminate is so much the better for its minimality. Is it so much the worse for its prescriptive force? That is, is default clarity specific enough for anyone to contravene it? It

21. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 88.

is. There is little terminological explication, at least of a straightforward sort, in Hegel, the later Wittgenstein, and even Husserl. Derrida, the later Heidegger, and Deleuze are considerably esoteric. So too, perhaps especially and certainly notoriously, are Walter Benjamin and Jacques Lacan. The scientific and arguably scientific turn in some recent Continental thought—Badiou, Deleuze, or at least some Deleuzians—would seem to increase technicality at a high price to accessibility. The same was already true of much Habermas and of Husserl. If, too, Nietzsche wrote only for his “free spirits,” and other philosophers mean or hope to communicate only with posterity, then this is not accessibility as I have defined it. We will see Adorno reject almost all of default clarity. Moreover, Brian Leiter is not the only philosopher to have opined thus: “It is fair to say that ‘clarity’ is, regrettably, becoming less and less a distinguishing feature of ‘analytic’ philosophy.”<sup>22</sup> Technicality may be uppermost in Leiter’s mind, a technicality that has increased within Analytical philosophy over the last thirty years or so.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps relatedly, an increasing amount of Western philosophy, whether Analytical, Continental, or otherwise, is jargonistic and verbose and yields imprecise, unrigorous texts.

Still, I am more concerned with what tells against departure from default clarity than to allege departures from it. Rigor, precision, and terminological explication may be grouped together as “spelling things out.” My first three arguments for default clarity are for such spelling out. A fourth is for accessibility. All four arguments develop the ideas they defend and, crucially, elaborate the status of default clarity as a default.

(1) *Gratuitous difficulty*. Not spelling things out tends to make discourse harder to understand—for several reasons. Enthymatic argument is hard to follow. Eschewal of hypotaxis creates formidable obstacles for the reader. Vagueness can make a thought harder to understand. Ambiguity can mislead. Blanshard stressed the obfuscation that results from excessive generality.<sup>24</sup> Terminological explication speaks for itself in the present

22. Brian Leiter, “‘Analytic’ and ‘Continental’ Philosophy,” available online at the Philosophical Gourmet Report website, <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/analytic.asp>.

23. John E. Smith, “Blanshard on Philosophical Style,” *Idealistic Studies* 20, no. 2 (1990): 100. Levy suggests that Analytical philosophy is more technical than Continental philosophy because it has a smaller and more specialized audience (“Analytic and Continental Philosophy,” p. 296).

24. Brand Blanshard, *On Philosophical Style* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1954), p. 29.

context. To eschew these features of default clarity without good reason is to complicate one's prose gratuitously.

(2) *Dangers of confusion, obscurantism, and discipleship.* Spelling things out reduces the likelihood that a philosopher will be confused or inchoate or will confuse their audience. For that philosopher and the audience will be following the steps. Spelling things out increases the chance of detecting obscurantism too. Conscious or at least unheeded senselessness will obtrude when one tries to reconstruct the (or a) sense. Lastly here, spelling things out facilitates critical engagement and so makes a philosopher less likely to gather uncritical followers: "Rigor makes it routine to check the correctness of an argument."<sup>25</sup> Conceivably, a discourse that does not spell things out might gain something thereby. Yet the foregoing points (including argument 1) place the justificatory burden on the dissenter.

(3) *Emancipation presupposes understanding.* If at least some form of emancipatory intent is valuable, as I submit it is, then, given that spelling things out tends to increase intelligibility, philosophy should embrace default clarity. For a philosophy must be understood, at least partially, if it is to emancipate in any of the senses indicated above. An approach that denies this—as perhaps "government house utilitarianism" and Bolshevism do—sits ill with the concept of emancipation itself, with most construals of democracy, and with traditional (Socratic, Enlightenment) ideas of philosophy. For the same reason, the burden of proof is placed on those who would emancipate people from *reason*. Or that is so at least given the aforementioned dangers of obscurantism together with the risk of becoming incoherent by using reason to criticize reason.<sup>26</sup>

(4) *The need for accessibility.* (a) To the degree that a discourse is technical and/or esoteric, it will be less intelligible to many audiences. (b) As argued, inaccessibility makes confusion, obscurantism, and discipleship more likely. (c) "If [an addressee] comes away confused, philosophy may take on the feel of an exclusive club, where only those who have participated in some secret ritual may enter. Philosophy is exclusive enough without marshalling its style against would-be readers."<sup>27</sup> (d) "[S]imply

25. W. D. Hart, "Clarity," in *The Analytic Tradition: Meaning, Thought and Knowledge*, ed. David Bell and Neil Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 201.

26. On this latter point cf. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2nd ed., trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), p. xiii, and Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 119ff.

27. Chris Herrera, "A Defense of Blanshard's 'On Philosophical Style,'" *Idealistic Studies* 24, no. 1 (1994): 57.

put, it is in any writer's best interest to be understood. In other words, regardless of the difficulty involved, if the writer's message is important, there is a presumption that he or she should attempt to reach the widest audience, or the next best thing, the widest portion of a select audience."<sup>28</sup>

(e) Emancipation requires understanding (argument 3 above).

Points (a) through (e) mean that philosophy owes accessibility in a way that, for instance, natural science arguably does not. Of course, philosophical technicality and esotericism have their motivations. Spelling things out—rigor, precision, and terminological explication—can seem to demand technicality. The same goes for esotericism insofar as the *mot juste* may be unfamiliar. However, and as indicated, in requiring accessibility I require it as a constraint. Default clarity enjoins a *balance* between accessibility and technicality/esotericism. How the balance is to be struck is moot. There are questions about what can be expected of the reader or hearer as against of the author or speaker, about the relative importance of precision and accessibility, and about the relativity of technicality or esotericism to audience and to wider cultural context. Still, requiring a balance does rule something out. It rules out a simple disregard of either precision or accessibility. Derrida, for one, comes close to disregarding accessibility, as did, for instance, Spinoza in the *Ethics*.<sup>29</sup> (But, as I mean to make plain shortly, this does not mean we should stop reading Spinoza—or Derrida.) More needs to be said, however. To that end, I consider four objections.

Objection (1): *Default clarity will reduce a valuable play of interpretation.* Hubert Dreyfus calls *Being and Nothingness* a brilliant misunderstanding of Heidegger.<sup>30</sup> Elements of default clarity—spelling things out? accessibility?—could impede such fruitful misreadings or (mis)appropriations. But such fruitfulness comes at a cost: “If one side of an issue is not clearly stated the subsequent debate will be at cross purposes.”<sup>31</sup> Also, the greater the emphasis on fecundity or creativity, the

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

29. Derrida, *Points*, pp. 187–88. Blanshard makes the comparison with science. Also, he puts the onus for clarity upon the philosophical writer as against the reader (*On Philosophical Style*, p. 6).

30. Hubert Dreyfus, interviewed by Brian Magee, in Magee, *The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 275.

31. R. L. Purtil, “On Working Both Sides of the Street,” *Metaphilosophy* 8, nos. 2–3 (1977): 114.



less emphasis there will be on appraisal. Thus Julian Young marks the following “serious danger”: “[O]nce, for example, Heidegger’s ideas are positioned on a smorgasbord of similar but also differing and competing options one becomes overwhelmed by the range of choice and the idea that any one set of ideas should be any truer than any other flies out of the window.”<sup>32</sup> Excessively eclectic synthesis of ideas is another risk.<sup>33</sup>

Objection (2): *Clarity unachievable*. I have granted that circumstances can make (certain versions of) either specificity or exactness unhappy. But this second objection may intend more. It may intend this: all profound philosophy, perhaps by virtue of opening up new vistas, leaves much unexplained. Yet I do not mean default clarity to entail that, for instance, Kant should have fully clarified the intuition-concept distinction before publishing the *Critique of Pure Reason*. To require that, would approach requiring that all philosophy be perfect. In that (further) sense, full spelling-out is impossible. Default clarity means to enjoin only that reasonable efforts be made. However, one might hold this: either because of “vagueness *de re*” (the idea that the world itself is indeterminate) or because of limitation in our cognition, some things are inherently obscure to us. If some things are thus inherently obscure, there may be philosophical truths expressible only gnomically, possibly after the manner of Heraclitus. Yet the premise of that claim is onerous, while the undesirability of gratuitous difficulty and the dangers of obscurantism are patent.

Objection (3): *Default clarity inapplicable to breakthroughs*. I grant that great philosophical novelty may warrant a slackening of the demands of accessibility. Indulgence extended to work in progress is commonsensical. Further yet, so long as one *seeks* clarity, it can be worth saying something even if one cannot say it clearly. But these are small concessions. I add that a particular obligation of clarity falls upon epigones to, and commentators upon, putatively great but obscure works or thinkers. For commentators are tasked to explain; and with epigones the dangers of discipleship are at their height. Again, the objection may intend more. It may intend the view that new ideas cannot be rendered clearly in old idioms. That view presupposes a notion of incommensurability just as controversial, and hence just

32. Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 32n4.

33. Kevin Mulligan, “Post-Continental Philosophy: Nosological Notes,” *Stanford French Review* 17, nos. 2–3 (1993): sect. 1.

as in need of justification, as are various Continental claims that mean to justify novel procedures.<sup>34</sup>

Objection (4): *Default clarity misconstrues philosophy*. Some views make Continental philosophy continuous with literature and/or politics.<sup>35</sup> The idea may be that such philosophy makes no claims and hence should not be beholden to rigor or precision or terminological explication and perhaps even to accessibility. However, only an impoverished view of literature sees it as unconcerned with truth; and only a very cynical yet ultimately normative view of politics would see ideas merely as tools in a struggle for power. An alternative construal of the objection, though, runs thus: Philosophy, or perhaps that which should succeed philosophy, does make claims, but claims that are not directly or simply propositional. The mode of thought that the later Heidegger advocates is, again, a plausible example. Similarly—to continue this rough ride over difficult terrain—perhaps there is an ineliminable non-literal element to philosophy or an element that subverts the literal/non-literal distinction.<sup>36</sup> Such deep waters require deep justifications. If my arguments above are sufficient, default clarity does not. It might be objected further that default clarity would deprive us of great philosophy. But to propose default clarity is not to assert that it would have been better had, for instance, Deleuze, Hegel, and Kierkegaard never written. Rather, where those thinkers depart from default clarity, they need good reason to do so; and *if* such reason is lacking, it would have been *better* had they conformed to default clarity.

There is a complication. The complication has to do with a second-order lack of default clarity. There is such a second-order lack in the case of a text that both means to explain or defend text that is unclear, *and* is *itself* unclear (itself does not satisfy default clarity). My previous arguments do not exempt such second-order unclarity. Moreover, such second-order contexts seem to carry a particular obligation to default clarity or to something very like it. To combine the words of two other

34. Heidegger qualified a survey of this thought as follows: “Every effort to bring what has been thought closer to prevailing modes of presentation must assimilate what is to be thought to those representations and thereby inevitably deform them” (Heidegger, “Preface” to William Richardson, *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 3rd ed. [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974], pp. viii–xi; translation modified).

35. Mulligan, “Post-Continental Philosophy,” sects. 2–3.

36. See especially Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 420.

philosophers who have written on clarity: in such a context, there is a “communicative a priori”<sup>37</sup> that consists in an “implicit promise to genuinely convey an idea.”<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, a philosopher who has a principled reason for avoiding default clarity might take that reason to extend to the presentation of that reason itself. Either way, one wants to know whether philosophers who eschew default clarity do so *successfully*. In what follows I examine how one philosopher fares in that regard.

### III. Adorno

Insistently, and more explicitly than is usually realized, Adorno rejects default clarity. The rejection looms largest in his essay “Skoteinos.” What follows orientates itself via “Skoteinos” but also draws upon Adorno more widely.<sup>39</sup> The Greeks dubbed Heraclitus *skotos* (dark, obscure). Hegel defended Heraclitus against that charge (*H* 102). Similarly, Adorno’s essay means to defend Hegel against the criticism that “Someone who cannot state what he means without ambiguity [*nicht eindeutig*] is not worth wasting time on” (*H* 95). Adorno comments: “Like the desire for explicit definitions [*Begierde nach Verbaldefinitionen*] to which it is related, this concept of clarity has survived the philosophy in which it originated and has become autonomous” (*H* 95). “The concept of clarity,” Adorno continues, “has been preserved as dogma and reapplied to a philosophy that long ago subjected it to critical reflection and therefore ought not to have to comply with it unquestioningly” (*H* 95–96). “Skoteinos” tries to substantiate this contention by criticizing “the ideal of clarity” (*Klarheitsideal*). It is in so doing, and in advocating “intelligibility” (*Verständlichkeit*) as a replacement ideal or as true clarity, that Adorno challenges default clarity.

Adorno identifies Descartes as the origin of the ideal of clarity at issue (although there is a footnote on the pre-history of the ideal). The Cartesian

37. Wood, “Style and Strategy,” p. 501.

38. Herrera, “A Defense of Blanshard’s ‘On Philosophical Style,’” p. 58.

39. I know of no extended treatment of “Skoteinos” (German title: “Skoteinos oder Wie zu lesen sei”). Nor is there much on Adorno and clarity in general. The most notable exception is Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), ch. 2. See also Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), ch. 5, and Shiery Weber Nichol森, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), *passim*.

*Klarheitsideal* comprises the doctrine of clear and distinct ideas. That doctrine, Adorno argues, surreptitiously and illegitimately generalizes geometrical exactitude into a universally applicable norm (*H* 96–97). Concerned as it is with specific features of the Cartesian conception, the argument does not obviously target default clarity.<sup>40</sup> But Adorno is most interested in what he construes as a latter-day version or descendant of the Cartesian ideal; and that version of the ideal, we shall see, does have to do with default clarity.

Adorno associates the newer version of the *Klarheitsideal* with the “scientific [scientistic?] conception of knowledge” (*szientifischen Erkenntnisbegriff*). “Rationalist in the historical sense,” this version of the ideal—which henceforward is what I mean by “the ideal of clarity”—“demands that knowledge trim and shape its object a priori, as though the object had to be a static mathematical object.” It presupposes that “the object itself is such that the subject’s gaze can pin it down like the figures of geometry.” As in Descartes, Adorno continues, an “a priori decision is made about the object.” “Clarity can be demanded of all knowledge only when it has been determined that the objects under investigation are free of all dynamic qualities that would cause them to elude the gaze that tries to capture and hold them unambiguously” (all *H* 98).<sup>41</sup> These points require some unpacking.

The ideal of clarity construes concepts as exact and thus presupposes the determinacy of their referents. Adorno denies both parts of the view. Concepts are not exact but rather “autonomous” (*H* 112). That is, *concepts cannot be captured by classical conditions*. “Skoteinos” appeals here to Husserl’s notion that the “vagueness [*Vagheit*] of the concepts, the circumstance that they have moving [*fließende*] spheres of application, is no

40. Descartes held that clarity consists in an idea or perception being “present and manifest to an attentive mind” (Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, part one, sect. 45; translation from *H* 96). However, Descartes understood such presentation through his conception of “the sensory-spatial world, the *res extensa*” (*H* 96); and *res extensa* is matter as defined by the geometrical properties of divisibility, figure, and motion. Thus, geometrical ideas are not accidentally among those that are clear and distinct. Rather, in effect, Descartes stipulates that geometrical exactitude be the measure of all perceptual—and perhaps entirely all—clarity. Or so “Skoteinos” argues. Incidentally, Heidegger’s criticism of Cartesian clarity in *Being and Time* (sect. 21) can be said to begin where Adorno leaves off.

41. German original: “...die sie dem eindeutig festhaltenden Blick entzöge.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), 5:333 (translation corrected).

defect attaching to them” (*H* 102).<sup>42</sup> As to the correlative notion of the determinacy of *things*, outside “Skoteinos” Adorno appeals to Nietzsche’s maxim about only the ahistorical being definable.<sup>43</sup> Within “Skoteinos,” Adorno claims that Hegel has shown that objects and subjects are not “static” (*H* 99). That is, objects (and subjects) somehow vary with context; hence (to reconstruct a little) no set of reasonably non-disjunctive classical conditions can define objects. “Faced with this,” Adorno infers, “the simple demand for clarity and distinctness becomes obsolete. The traditional categories do not remain intact within the dialectic; the dialectic permeates each of them and alters its inherent complexion” (*H* 99).<sup>44</sup>

To deny the general applicability of classical conditions is to criticize one particular and substantive construal of precision, albeit one that, as Adorno maintains, persisted beyond seventeenth-century rationalism. (W. D. Hart argues that Frege shared with the rationalists not merely a “semantic ideal,” whereby philosophy seeks the type of highly determinate truth exemplified by a logical or mathematical theorem, but also an “epistemic thesis,” according to which “some thoughts which are convincing merely in being thought are, perhaps for that reason, known to be true.”<sup>45</sup>) But Adorno has more. He maintains that the essay—to which form most of his work conforms or approximates, and which he calls the “the critical

42. The passage Adorno is quoting discusses non-mathematical concepts used in natural science. Husserl’s examples are the (botanical?) terms “notched,” “indented, lens-shaped, umbrelliform,” concepts that are vague (inexact) in that their sense or content varies with their application or context. See Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 206–7.

43. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 29; Adorno, “Society,” in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 267.

44. The conception of the subject and object as in motion is “one of the central tenets of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*” (*H* 99). The broad Hegelian context here is the logico-historical development of experience/knowledge (see especially sects. 76–89 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). On that model, the subject apprehends objects ever more adequately and ultimately fully adequately. Each step on this road to “absolute knowing” reveals a “shape of consciousness” (*Gestalt des Bewußtsein*) to be inadequate to its object, a shape then replaced by an improved successor. Crucially, however, the process changes the object itself and not just its apprehension. Despite the goal of adequacy, consciousness in some wise constitutes its objects. Section 3 will indicate that Adorno shares a view of that latter kind.

45. Hart, “Clarity,” p. 199.

form *par excellence*”—“rejects definitions of its concepts.”<sup>46</sup> Adorno is rejecting just about all forms of definition here. That is evident not only from his general practice, but also from his explicit rejection of hypotaxis (a rejection that, as such, is a rejection of part of that which I define as rigor). One expression of the rejection of hypotaxis is as follows.

Dialectical thinking, under this aspect, means that an argument should take on the pungency of a thesis and a thesis contain within itself the fullness of its reasoning. All bridging concepts, all links and logical auxiliary operations that are not part of the matter itself, all secondary developments not saturated with the experience of the object, should be discarded. In a philosophical text all the propositions ought to be equally close to the center.<sup>47</sup>

Such extreme parataxis represents or serves what “Skoteinos” calls an ideal of “nonargumentative thought” (*H* 141). That ideal is Adorno’s alternative to the *Klarheitsideal*.

Adorno introduces his alternative discursive ideal as follows: “Of course one cannot grossly neglect the demand for clarity; philosophy should not succumb to confusion and destroy the very possibility of its existence. What we should take from this is the urgent demand that the expression fit the matter expressed precisely, even where the matter in hand does not conform to the customary notion of what can be indicated clearly” (*H* 100). “Best able to meet the demands of this predicament,” it is proposed, “would be a philosophical language that would strive for intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] without confusing it with clarity” (*H* 105). Again: “The specificity of philosophy as a configuration of moments is qualitatively different from a lack of ambiguity in every particular moment, even within the configuration [*Konfiguration*], because the configuration itself is more, and other, than the quintessence of its moments” (*H* 109). Adorno comes to call such configurations “constellations” (*Konstellationen*). I shall return to constellations. Here, I note that Adorno’s parataxis has an important chain of consequences. Firstly, it makes his texts unusually allusive. That allusiveness means that equivocations or ambiguities are not quite or simply such. Or at least they do not mean to be. As Adorno

46. Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 2 vols., trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991, 1994), 1:18, 12.

47. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 71. Cf. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 2:131.

says of Hegel, the intention is to “bear witness to the unity of what is [in other respects] different” (*H* 117). The weight of allusion makes Adorno’s texts dense. Adorno likens them to densely woven carpets<sup>48</sup> and spiderwebs.<sup>49</sup> The density of *Adornodeutsch*—as Adorno’s prose came to be called—creates an aphoristic quality. That quality in turn relates to the “exemplary obviousness” and “sudden flashes of illumination” that Adorno would like to generate (*H* 108) and which he seeks through techniques including explicit or actual aphorisms, shock, provocative formulations, and exaggeration.<sup>50</sup> Each of these techniques tends to considerably reduce accessibility.

In fact, in work he intended for publication, as against lectures or radio broadcasts, Adorno shunned accessibility. He did so on principle, stressing that accessibility can amount to a digestibility that operates as a reiteration or confirmation of what the audience believes already.<sup>51</sup> That is plausible, as is the notion that ideas can be simplified to the point at which comprehension is hindered rather than helped. But Adorno, again, goes further:

The injunction to practice intellectual honesty usually amounts to sabotage of thought. The writer is urged to show explicitly all the steps that have led him to his conclusion, so enabling every reader to follow the process through and, where possible—in the academic industry—to duplicate it. This demand not only invokes the liberal fiction of the universal communicability of each and every thought and so inhibits their objectively appropriate expression, but is also wrong in itself as a principle of representation. For the value of a thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar.<sup>52</sup>

According to Adorno, that which normally passes for objectivity is actually subjective, because it consists of that which is universally recognizable and thus of superficialities and dogma.<sup>53</sup> Adorno even asserts, although possibly with knowing exaggeration, that “Only those thoughts are true which do not understand themselves.”<sup>54</sup>

48. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 87.

49. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 1:13.

50. Cf. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, pp. 12–13.

51. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, sect. 64.

52. *Ibid.*, sect. 50.

53. See, for instance, *ibid.*, sect. 43.

54. *Ibid.*, sect. 122 (translation modified).



Adorno, then, rejects (1) terminological explication, (2) rigor qua hypotaxis, (3) precision qua univocity, and (4) accessibility. Seemingly, then, Adorno comprehensively rejects default clarity. Several putative or possible justifications for that rejection have emerged. Some of them are evidently insufficient. The alleged unhappiness of classical conditions cannot invalidate terminological explication as such; and nothing has compelled the thought that accessibility *must* misfire in gross simplification. What requires further investigation is Adorno's claim that the aforementioned technique of constellation affords its own kind of precision and rigor.<sup>55</sup>

Adorno presents constellation thus: “[C]entered about a thing,” concepts “lend objectivity” to it. “As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping 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 to a combination of numbers.”<sup>56</sup> Constellation deploys concepts “in such a way that their arbitrariness is deceased through their position” (*H* 107). So, as several stars comprise an astronomical constellation, so a phenomenon can be illuminated by several concepts. Adorno holds also that phenomena themselves resemble constellations. As “specific, culturally pre-formed objects,”<sup>57</sup> they comprise aspects each of which is illuminated by one or more concepts. Here one broaches Adorno's complex theory of mediation (*Vermittlung*), according to which entities are what they are—and not just genetically, causally—by dint of conceptual, social, and historical factors.<sup>58</sup> I cannot much enter into that theory here. But at a minimum one can grant the following. At

55. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 1:12–13.

56. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 162–63.

57. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 1:5.

58. “[T]o the thing the concept is not contingent and external”; rather, “in Hegelian language, the concept articulates the life of the thing itself” (Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982], p. 115; translation modified). “Subjectivity pervades the object” (*ibid.*, p. 156). “The a priori and society are intertwined” (Theodor W. Adorno, “Subject and Object,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt [New York: Continuum, 1997], p. 504). “[T]hings are not simply so and not otherwise... they have come to be under certain conditions. Their becoming fades and dwells within the thing” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 52). “[I]n the individual thing and outside it,” as “something encompassing in which the individual has its place,” there is an “inner” or “sedimented history” (*ibid.*, p. 163).

least some objects owe features to social and conceptual factors, perhaps even in the extra-genetic sense that such features can exist only so long as certain conceptual or social arrangements obtain. (Without the everyday concept of constellation itself, there could be no constellations but only stars. Without certain broadly social arrangements, there could be goods but no commodities.)

Karl Jaspers thought Adorno's writing consisted of "hodgepodes of anything and everything that comes to mind."<sup>59</sup> Now certainly Adorno did not *mean* to proceed that way. The apparent arbitrariness of constellation means to disclose the manifold determinations of objects of analysis. But Adorno's approach does tend to work well only under a condition: the condition that a reasonably specific explicandum is already at hand. Such is the case when he is treating a particular musical work, a Kantian thesis, or a well-defined experience. It is less often the case when he analyzes society, or reads Heidegger, or means to set out his own position on, for example, freedom or nature or identity. In such cases, which is to say in those circumstances where Adorno is unable to *import* precision, his techniques often fail to supply it.<sup>60</sup> I adduce the following as evidence: the excessive generality of Adorno's analyses of society;<sup>61</sup> the notorious weaknesses in Adorno's reading of Heidegger;<sup>62</sup> and the general difficulty of determining the content of Adorno's own central philosophical notions.<sup>63</sup>

The foregoing criticisms prompt the following claim. Imprecision, and especially excessive generality, mean that too often Adornian intelligibility does not live up to its name. That is so despite Adorno's avowed aim of

59. Karl Jaspers, letter of April 29, 1966, in Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926–1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 638. Cf. Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 189.

60. Cf. Harold Blumenfeld, "Ad Vocem Adorno," *Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (1991): 269.

61. Hans Albert, "The Myth of Total Reason," in Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), pp. 163–97; Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), ch. 3.

62. See, for instance, Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (Routledge: New York, 2006), pp. 108–10.

63. See Nicholas Joll, *The Determination and Deformation of Beings: A Critical Interpretation of Adorno and Heidegger* (forthcoming as a book from Continuum Books).

doing justice to that which Hegel denigrated as *faulen Existenz* (foul or lazy existence),<sup>64</sup> i.e., to particularity. If the conclusion is thought too fast, I recall that, since the advantages of default clarity are not to be foresworn quickly, the burden of proof is Adorno's. But in fact the conclusion is fast. For Adorno does urge that there is no better alternative to his techniques. One locus of that contention is the notion of "identity thinking" (*Identitätsdenken*). Sometimes that notion seems intended to make the following claim. Concepts necessarily occlude their referents by implying or suggesting that the concept entirely identifies the referent. Better, and showing the connection with Adornian intelligibility: only concepts placed in constellation avoid, or at least minimize, such occlusion.<sup>65</sup> But is the ostensible problem here, the problem that constellation means to solve, a real one? In effect, "the nucleus of all second-generation critical theory critiques of Adorno" is that it is not.<sup>66</sup> Certainly it seems bizarre to fault concepts for being unable to do something that they cannot and need not do and appear, *pace* Adorno, not to intend. Still, the criticism misses Adorno's more considered or charitably construed position. Describing someone as, say, black, or homosexual, or as a shopkeeper, may be a *kind* of identity assertion. Such judgments can take, or tend to take, the person in question to be *only* as predicated, or as *most saliently* as predicated. Yet identity thinking so construed hardly suffices to warrant Adorno's stylistic procedures.<sup>67</sup>

The idea of identity thinking intends, or is at least connected to, further points. Here I can merely mark those points. First, there is Adorno's construal of what he calls "Kant's block." Adorno believes that Kant's claim that we cannot know things as they are in themselves is "realistic."<sup>68</sup> The block accurately portrays *contemporary* reality.<sup>69</sup> Such reality is best

64. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 8.

65. For this view, see for example (and in "Skoteinos") Adorno, *Hegel*, pp. 100, 105. Probably this view underlies Adorno's generalized suspicion of definitions.

66. Jay Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), p. 267n3. Cf. Raymond Geuss, "Negative Dialectics," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 6 (1975): 167–75; and, for a good example of such critique, Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 71–72.

67. For more on identity thinking, see Nicholas Joll, "Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Its Theme, Point, and Methodological Status" (forthcoming in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*).

68. Adorno, "Subject and Object," p. 501.

69. *Ibid.*

penetrated, Adorno maintains, by a particular, and in fact fragmented, literary form.<sup>70</sup> Here we broach both the kind of interpretation (*Interpretation, deutende Philosophie*) that Adorno means to employ and his critique of modernity. That critique alleges a “false whole”<sup>71</sup> and an “administered life.” Some of the claims underlying these charges impute reification and commodity fetishism.<sup>72</sup> Other claims seem to have a different modality. Adorno writes of “the demonically distorted form which things and men have assumed in the light of unprejudiced cognition.”<sup>73</sup> He alleges a “subjection of reality to logical formalism.”<sup>74</sup> If any of these claims are to support the ideal of intelligibility, they must be both true and tenably connected to that ideal. But it is a considerable challenge even to understand the claims, or at least those that seemingly impute a general deformation of beings.

However, Adorno has yet further ideas relevant to the justification of his advocacy of “intelligibility” as a replacement for (what I call) default clarity. For one thing, he suggests that justification and rendering reasons are different things and that rendering reasons is complicit with what he means to oppose.<sup>75</sup> But Adorno does not elaborate the distinction, and just how he intends it is unclear. The distinction may amount to an appeal to the illuminating power of constellatory thought.<sup>76</sup> Argument above entails that such an appeal is not enough. Additionally, however, Adorno understands his prose as not entirely propositional.<sup>77</sup> That self-understanding is bound up with (1) mimesis, a concept “notoriously difficult to come to grasp with within the Adornian *oeuvre*,”<sup>78</sup> and, partly via mimesis, with (2) Adorno’s elaborate aesthetics.<sup>79</sup>

70. See, for instance, Theodor W. Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 23–39.

71. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 50.

72. See, for instance, Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 1:40, 220; Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xv and passim; and Adorno, “Society.”

73. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 28.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

75. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. xix. Heidegger’s *Der Satz Vom Grund*—a rather untranslatable title—makes a comparable move.

76. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 3.

77. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, 1:22; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 5–7.

78. Espen Hammer, “Minding the World: Adorno’s Critique of Idealism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 1 (2000): 84.

79. For a summary of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*, see Peter Osborne, “Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problem of a ‘Postmodern’ Art,” in *The Problems of*

In fact, Adorno “discussed his method and style in everything he wrote.”<sup>80</sup> I infer that an exploration longer than is possible here would be needed to decide whether or not Adorno adequately defends his procedures. However, the limited discussion that I have provided supports the view that the burden of proof of the matter lies—*continues* to lie—with Adorno, or rather, today, with his defenders. Finally: even were Adorno’s rejection of default clarity to be proven insufficient, that would not mean that there is nothing to be learned from Adorno. Rather, it would mean that what there is to be learned from Adorno is to be learned despite, not via, his manner of proceeding.

#### ***IV. Concluding Thoughts***

This article has made some mention of the later Wittgenstein and the later Heidegger. I have indicated that the later Heidegger departs from at least some aspects of default clarity. I have noted that the later Wittgenstein eschews definitions, at least of a certain sort; and perhaps he departs from default clarity in other ways too. (How hypotactical is the *Investigations*? How accessible is it? How precise is it?) I have also indicated that both thinkers seem to have *reasons* for departing from default clarity. Examination of these matters—of how far Wittgenstein and Heidegger conform to default clarity, and, where they do not, why they do not—could be profitable. It is not only that attention to the form or forms that those writers employ might help us better understand what they mean to say. It is also that any departures from default clarity and any attendant justifications would be further tests, from two powerful thinkers, of the adequacy of default clarity (of the default value of rigor, precision, accessibility, and explication of terms, as I have construed those notions). Recall the assault on the classical conditions conception of clarity, an assault in which Adorno, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein are all involved. Perhaps the same beleaguering awaits part of default clarity. However, given the arguments for default clarity advanced herein, I suspect that some version of that clarity will retain its prescriptive force.

An omission from this paper relates to the further testing of default clarity. By considering only textual or *discursive* clarity (and that, indeed, only in philosophy), I have neglected *perceptual* clarity. Now Husserl, in

*Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 23–38.

80. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, p. 12.

many places, indicates that the clarity he seeks is intimately involved with perceptual clarity. That idea may be present in phenomenology in general. So it may be present in the early Heidegger. The idea may even be held by some outside the phenomenological tradition. Those others perhaps include Wittgenstein.<sup>81</sup>

81. I thank the following members of the University of Essex: Béatrice Han-Pile, Peter Dews, Wayne Martin, Fabian Freyenhagen, Nicholas Walker, Beck Pitt, and Robert Farrow. I thank also Scott Biagi, Karin Bauer, Charmaine Coyle, David Dusenbury, James Luchte, Brian O'Connor, R. R. Rockingham-Gill, Anne Raustøl, and, for an initial stimulus, Stephen Mulhall. Audiences at Dundee, Essex, and Lampeter provided helpful responses to earlier versions.

# *Poetics as a Presupposition of Philosophy: Hannah Arendt's Denktagebuch\**

Sigrid Weigel

The *Denktagebuch*, kept by Hannah Arendt from 1950 until 1973, is not only a fascinating parergon, or secondary work, containing many reflections, observations, and notes on other articles that had not, or not yet, taken on their finished form as essays or books. It presents the foundations and premises of her writing that originate from her notebooks—foundations in a literal sense, i.e., those writings that preceded the author's work in political theory. Several entries contain methodological reflections, explanations of definitions, and analyses of philosophical texts. These are self-commentaries on her own publications, such as reflections on the ambiguous and often misunderstood use of the word "Origin" in the title of her book on totalitarianism; or they are materials for current projects—for example, the reflections on the methods of historiography or on concepts like tradition, progress, time, life, and judgment. At times, however, they also seem like concentrated monads of particular aspects of her later writings, as in her thoughts on forgiveness. Compared with a work journal, Arendt's *Denktagebuch* goes a step further, in that it also contains much that was *not* included in her writings; it is more than simply a personal or private journal, of the sort that supplies researchers with biographical material for the "decoding" of an author's work.

The *Denktagebuch* is, in fact, a journal *of* thought and *about* thought, in which the determination of thought as a space for dialogue with oneself weaves through the notebooks as a leitmotif: "The soundless dialogue

\* Translated by Matthew Congdon and Kathryn McQueen. Quotations from German-language sources have also been translated. Throughout, the word "poetics" has been used to translate "Dichtung," which should be understood in the broad sense of not just poetry but creative composition in general.



of thought, the two-in-one” (XXVI/25, 721).<sup>1</sup> Thinking understood and practiced in this way cannot be fully integrated and enveloped within philosophy, insofar as philosophy is dependent on concepts and systematic distinctions. For Arendt, thinking as a requisite for philosophy instead maintains a proximity to poetry, to the language of metaphor, to sensual perception in analogies, and to experience. In this way, the expectations extended to poets are by no means low, since Arendt brings them into association with truth: “We expect the truth from them (not from the philosophers, from whom we expect thought)” (XIX/35, 496). Despite—or because—of this expectation, poetic language, unlike the conceptual language of philosophy, maintains a consciousness of the problem of a fundamental “untranslatability” between the senses and truth (see the entry on truth, XXIII/4, 600).

### *Journals and Privacy: The Early Notebooks*

Even prior to these twenty-eight notebooks, which were recently published by Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann under the title *Denktagebuch* and which contain twenty-three years worth of notes, Arendt had already kept notebooks. For instance, in her *Nachlass* (collected papers), housed in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, are notebooks from 1923 onward, filled with poems, stories, essays, and reflections, dating from her years of study in Marburg, Freiburg, and Heidelberg. Many of the poems in these notebooks are personal entries of the young student, who—in the more lyrical, sentimental language typical of youth—gave expression to the effects of her intense yet secretive relationship with her teacher and lover, Martin Heidegger.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as the literary form is used here as a genre of autobiographical experience, these notebooks take on the status of a private diary—private also in the sense of Arendt’s theory of the private as a place “where one is at once sheltered and hidden [*wo man zugleich*

1. Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950 bis 1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (Munich: Piper, 2002). All the following quotes are from this edition, unless other sources are given.

2. Cf. *Notebook 1923–25*: “No Word breaks though the darkness—/No God lifts a hand—/Where ever I look/land piles up./No form that loosens,/No shadow that hovers./ And still hear it:/Too late, too late” (The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, p. 022974). Arendt’s poems from 1923 to 1925 are printed in Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1998), pp. 365–85.

*geborgen und verborgen ist]<sup>3</sup>—a kind of biographical secondary text that accompanies the work of the prospective philosopher.*

The fact that Arendt's *Nachlass*, including these private notebooks, is widely available on the internet today, does not come without irritation when one recalls her theory of concealment in *Vita Activa* (1958) or when one comes across the following entry in the *Denktagebuch*: "Private life: a tautology, everything is private. No life, as long as it is being lived, can stand the public. For that reason, no life can be a 'work of art'" (XXII/14, 566). "As long as it is being lived": it follows from this claim that life loses its concealment and privacy through death, and becomes a part of history. A similar interpretation is confirmed in another entry, in which life—as event [*Begebenheit*]<sup>4</sup>—is placed in a dialectical relationship with history.

History: only an event has a beginning and an end, history precisely not. . . . But that means: as long as one lives, one remains outside of history, because the event, which one is, has not yet come to an end. Only what has ended is worthy of history. The dead man, however, vanishes from the earth, not from history, insofar as he has left himself behind. (XXIII/5, 601)

This view of the relationship between life and death might also explain the fact that Arendt left behind her correspondence in a clearly ordered archive, in which her own letters, predominately in carbon copy, are kept. As such, her theory of legacy [*Hinterlassenschaft*] also materializes itself in the Arendt archive, as a documentation of life, which after death becomes a part of the history in which one lived, and which stands in tension with the lived life. The *Denktagebuch* speaks precisely from within this tension. Unlike the early notebooks, it does not recount the concealed traces of life beyond the work but instead surveys the space of writing that opens itself up to the transitions between experience and philosophy, between dialogues with others and the self-dialogue of thought, between reading and writing, between the languages of poetry and philosophy. On the other hand, it contains nothing of those intimate sketches of the soul that journal-writers otherwise like to confide to the page.

3. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 71 (translation modified).

### ***The Beginning of the Denktagebuch: Constellations of Multiple Transitions***

The transition from the previous entries to this changed status of the notebooks is marked by the establishment of a new beginning. In March 1950, three months after she had returned from her first visit to Germany since her emigration, Arendt designated this beginning in the middle of a notebook that already contained several entries, by writing the date “June 1950” and the number “1” on the page upon which she began a longer essay on guilt, forgiveness, and reconciliation. With this, the newly added—dated and numbered—notes are separated from the texts that were entered previously (begun in 1942) in the same notebook. *Before* this break, one finds stories with titles such as “The Stone that Falls from Hearts,” “The Door,” “With One’s Head through the Wall,” which obviously reflect life experiences in allegorical form, as well as a number of poems, such as “To W. B.,” from October 1942, presumably composed on the occasion of the second anniversary of Walter Benjamin’s death.<sup>4</sup>

This poem could have also found its place in the *Denktagebuch*. In keeping with her conviction that only a life that has reached its end enters into history, the names of loved ones or intimate friends only appear in these notes as names of the dead: Herman Broch (1951), Erich Neumann (1960), Heinrich Blücher (1970). A memorial poem is dedicated to Neumann, a distant friend from university days who died in remote Tel Aviv, which holds on to one of the gestures with which he inscribed himself in her memory: “Nov. 30, 1960/*Erich Neumann’s death.*/What was left of you? Nothing more than a hand . . .” (XXIII/15, 613). By contrast, the short note about Broch betrays the shock caused by his unexpected death: “Broch died on May 30 and was buried on June 2, 1951” (IV/11, 90). After three entries that concerned other topics, separate from the note about his death, follows a poem about this experience—“To survive. But how does one live with the dead?”—and in connection with it a reflection: “since Broch’s death: unexpected for him . . . unexpected for me.” It refers to the missed opportunity for closeness and friendship, for Arendt had not wanted to believe in the approaching death of the friend, one with whom she had been in intense dialogue, above all on literature, since

4. Notebook 1942–1950, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. I thank Ursula Ludz, who generously provided me with copies from the beginning of this notebook, which precedes the published *Denktagebuch*.

1946.<sup>5</sup> In this entry, one finds this sentence: “Who a man is, one knows only after he is dead” (IV/15–16).<sup>6</sup> Thus, for Arendt, the end of life is not only a condition for history, but also for a kind of knowledge that is not (or no longer) affected by intimacy and personal emotions, untinged by the overlapping of intellectual and personal encounters. In this respect, a certain interval opens itself in the *Denktagebuch* between concealment/privacy and public/politics, between life and history, between thinking and public spirit, which must be grasped as a presupposition of her work. Arendt also marked a clear separation from the autobiographical records of a private diary by attaching an additional notebook with an index, which gathers the ideas and reflections of the *Denktagebuch* and opens up a (later) analysis of her writings.

Although the end of the notes is just as significant as the beginning, the end, in contrast to the beginning, is not a matter of decision. It designates more of a cessation than a completion, for soon after the death of her life partner, the notes trickle away. The last notebook, which begins, “1971 Without Heinrich,” contains only sporadic and increasingly scant entries; in the years 1972–73, one finds finally only travel plans and locations; and no entries appear for the remaining years prior to her own death in 1975. The beginning, by contrast, casts a clear light on the birth of Hannah Arendt as an American author of political theory.

When Arendt began on the first page with her reflections on guilt, forgiveness, and reconciliation, she had just returned three months earlier, from her first trip to Germany after sixteen years of exile. Her 1950 article about her “visit in Germany,” which she had written for the American magazine *Commentary*, bore marks of a great distance. Yet it also attests to a lucid understanding of the refusal of Germans at that time to set aside their recently past history. In this respect, one can also read the entry as *distinct* commentary on the visit to Germany, which—with reference to the reunion with Heidegger<sup>7</sup>—both reflects more personal experiences of the visit and outlines the problem areas that these experiences provided to her thinking, for a later theoretical elaboration. As Arendt writes: “The

5. Cf. Hannah Arendt and Hermann Broch, *Briefwechsel: 1946 bis 1951*, ed. Paul Michael Lützel (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1996).

6. A few years later, another poem to Broch followed, entitled “Brochs Grab” (XI/17, 265).

7. Cf. Heidegger’s letter from May 6, 1950, in Arendt and Heidegger, *Briefe*, pp. 103–6.

interrelationship of thinking and memory consists therein that all thinking is actually a thinking-along things” (XX/25, 489).

Arendt began the *Denktagebuch* around the same time that she was finishing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which represented her debut as a political theorist and also her appearance as a genuine American author. While her early writings, for the most part, originated from literature or from her preoccupation with literary writers (e.g., the Rahel book, the essays on Heine, Kafka, et al. in *Die verborgene Tradition*, and numerous articles and reviews<sup>8</sup>), literature faded into the background—more precisely into the hidden writings of the *Denktagebuch*, as a palimpsest and source of her work. While her own literary attempts, as forms of autobiographical expression, had become impossible given the established break in the notebooks, poetics extended into the *Denktagebuch*, with numerous poems, as an essential requisite of her thinking and philosophizing. Her own poems and many quotations of the poems of others, such as Dickinson, Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke, and Brecht, as well as the many literary motifs and citations that find themselves in the *Denktagebuch*—from authors as different as Virgil, Meister Eckhart, Milton, Claudius, Klopstock, Schiller, Goethe, Schlegel, Heine, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Valéry, Kafka, Melville, Faulkner, Dinesen, and Sarraute—are interpretable as mementos referring to the literary ground of her thinking.

Here, poetics no longer designates the other of philosophy—as was the case in the opposition between Arendt’s poems as a young student, which express the experiences of a love of a philosopher, and her philosophical dissertation on the concept of love in Augustine—but, rather, it now describes *the path of, or to, thought*. It is a testimony to life, which gives way to philosophy. This also corresponds to the role of citations as friends and witnesses. For in Arendt, her many quotations are not demonstrations of cultural knowledge, but rather the verification of her own perceptions through the language of other authors: “Interpretation, quotation—but only in order to have witnesses, and also friends” (XXVII/7, 756).

With Jaspers and Heidegger, those philosophers who also personally stand very close to Arendt, the citations become supplemented by conversation notes and fictional dialogues (or disputes). Here, thinking as a dialogical form of the “two-in-one,” as self-dialogue, gives way to a staged debate, as for instance, when Arendt lets the voices of the two

8. Cf. the bibliography in Hannah Arendt, *Ich will verstehen: Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich: Piper, 1996), pp. 257–327.

appear as opponents: “Jaspers and Heidegger: Jaspers could say: ‘How can a philosopher lack wisdom in this way?’ Heidegger could answer: ‘How can a thinker still care about wisdom, from where does he get the legitimation?’—Both are right” (I/23, 19).

Just as telling as the relation between literature and philosophy is the fact that, at exactly the same moment that she decides to consistently publish in English, Arendt begins an intellectual diary in German. That is, the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951 marks a significant change in association with her bilingualism, which has been given much too little attention in the discussion of her works.<sup>9</sup> Most of the texts written before this time were written in German, even if a few are like *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, which first appeared in English translation in 1958 and only afterward, in 1959, was published in Germany, in the unusual form of a subsequent original publication. The German publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which followed five years after its U.S. publication, is by contrast a translation from the English version, a practice that was the case for many of her subsequent publications.

As Arendt became a notable, international political personality in the 1950s, the beginning of the *Denktagebuch* in 1950 documents her desire for a necessary separation of thinking and writing, which keeps itself at a distance from the contemporary historical contexts in which she operated and involved herself. In this respect, the recently edited *Cahiers* are the documents of a multifaceted bilingualism: on the one hand, the author of political philosophy, the public person, professor at American universities, who teaches and publishes in English; on the other hand, the reflections, interjections, and thoughts that had not (yet) found their way in, or that could not find any place at all—and which, for the most part, were written in German. The *Denktagebuch* functions, then, as an arena for another kind of writing—beyond the expatriation from Germany and the naturalization in America.

### ***Bilingualism: Distance from Political Philosophy and America***

As Arendt’s texts on political theory are regarded as her American work, the *Denktagebuch* constitutes a space of writing that thematizes a dual skepticism and distance: both toward life in the United States and toward

9. An exception can be found in the passages on foreign language in Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia UP, 2001), pp. 185ff.

political philosophy. Thus, the notes reflect over and over the opposition between politics and philosophy, coming to a head in the assertion “that ‘political philosophy’ is a *contradictio in adjecto* [contradiction in terms],” a note written in May 1968, of all times, when otherwise the politicization of all areas of life and knowledge was the order of the day. Yet the reflection of the objective contradiction between politics and philosophy is for Arendt no reason not to engage in political philosophy, but rather is its presupposition, as the beginning of the following passage formulates: “Every ‘political philosophy’ precedes an understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics. It could be that . . .” (XXV/56, 683).

The same goes for Arendt’s attitude toward the United States. Thus, she describes the American “passion ‘to make the world a better place to live in’” as a transformation to “a ‘best of all possible worlds’,” in which life gets lost (V/6, 105) and events can no longer penetrate into human affairs: “Only in the event, however, in which the elements of human affairs come to a head, does the meaning of these affairs become clear; thus, the deprivation of meaning in American life” (V/10, 108).

Since she discusses such an integration of elements in the event, comparable to the dialectical picture or Benjamin’s theory of the monad—as well as a theory of history, namely, “Event and Element Theory,” which makes possible historical comprehension (V/5, 105)—it is not surprising that her manner of thinking and speaking encountered resistances and misunderstandings from American audiences. She analyzes this fact in April 1970 in the *Denktagebuch* under the heading “On the difficulties I have with my English readers,” which she systematically examines in four points. In it she distances herself from a view of language that she calls “thesaurus-philosophy,” which assumes “that words ‘express’ ideas that I supposedly have prior to having words.” She doubts, however, “that we would have any ‘ideas’ without language.” It has to do, then, with the opposition between analytic philosophy and a thinking that takes language as its point of departure, a kind of thinking that today operates in the United States under the name “Continental Philosophy.” In reference to several reviews of her writings, she interprets their critique as an attack on her specific kind of thinking: “What he means is that my thinking transcends mere description. Or: similes and metaphors.” This follows an example that, probably not accidentally, has to do with Benjamin, namely, Arendt’s declaration that he thinks poetically, that is, in metaphors, an observation that lead her to questions about metaphor, etc., reflections that,



according to views of the critics, have nothing to do with a representation of Benjamin: “What this adds up to is that the whole notion of thinking a matter through is alien to English ‘philosophy’” (XXVII/45, 770). This means that a poetic thinking and the notion of “thinking a matter through” are connected for Arendt. From this point of view, the English language, in which she publishes and which is “alien” to her thought, remains a foreign language, while the German language develops in the *Denktagebuch* as a space of thinking.

Yet it is precisely through bilingualism that Arendt arrived at her own writing. And thus she polemicizes too against the “Nonsense of world language—against the ‘*condition humaine*,’ the artificial, violent reduction of ambiguity [*Vereinseitigung des Vieldeutigen*]” and pleads for a “plurality of languages” and for the “multiplicity which is given with language and above all with languages” (II/5, 42). With language and with languages—i.e., that the interaction with the multiplicity of meaning can happen between various languages as well as in language *as such*—insofar as one does not understand language as expressing pre-linguistic ideas, but rather takes into account and uses its metaphorical nature, with which the nearness of thinking and poetics comes into play.

### ***Metaphor and Concept—Poetics and Thinking***

“What connects thinking and poetics is metaphor. In philosophy, one calls *concept* what in poetics is called *metaphor*. Thought creates from the visible its ‘concepts,’ in order to indicate the invisible.” Thus is it described in a commentary on Hans Blumenberg’s *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*: “He overlooks the fact that all thinking ‘transmits,’ is metaphorical” (XXVI/30, 728).

Here it becomes clear, how through the reading, i.e., debating with another, one of the leitmotifs of the *Denktagebuch* condenses into a thesis: all thinking is metaphorical. This does not mean that Arendt understands the relationship between philosophy and literature as analogous to the relationship between concept and metaphor, but rather that the representationality or figurativity of language reflects a fundamental requirement for all thought. The same words can be understood as concepts *or* metaphors, yet their designation as metaphor reflects the moment of transmission that is always inscribed in them—at least when it is a question of the designation of the invisible. Therefore, metaphors also maintain a closer relationship to truth than do concepts, a thesis that is not tantamount to the

assertion that metaphors are more truthful. The first note on metaphor that one finds in the *Denktagebuch* reads:

Metaphor and the Truth:

Nothing more clearly exposes the peculiar ambiguity of language—through which alone we can have and speak truth, through which alone we may actively create truth from the world, and which, in its necessary refinement, is always in our way in finding the truth—than does metaphor. (II/22, 46)

With this, Arendtian metaphor is by no means defined as the language of truth, but rather as a symptom, in which the very ambiguity of language becomes clear, which is the condition of possibility and, as it were, impossibility of truth. Even philosophy, which has to do with those areas that lie beyond the world of the visible, the material, and the phenomenal, is therefore reliant on metaphor: “The role of metaphor: the connection (is...as) of the visible to the invisible, the known to the unknowable, etc.” (XXVI/32, 729). Or: “The precedence of the sensual in metaphor” (XXVII/28, 764).

This “role” of transmission and analogy, which Arendt emphasizes in metaphor, also pertains to an aspect that interests her in Kant. While the notes in her Kant notebook revolve, above all, around the concepts of judgment and critique, the same author occurs in the other notebooks in the context of her reflections on metaphor: “*Ad* metaphor: Kant on analogies: they must guide us wherever ‘the understanding lacks the threads of unmistakable proof’ (*Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*). For example: the relation of God to the world in analogy to the relation of man to his product” (XXV/34, 674).

This “wherever the understanding lacks the threads of unmistakable proof” refers not only to philosophical work in the realm of the invisible, but also—as she reflects in another note—“human affairs”: “The invisible: the ‘images’ of the power of the imagination, which induce contemplation and the identification of truth and outlook, and the ‘concepts’ that allow language. The latter are always attained in the realm of human affairs; the former refer to ‘givens,’ nature, the universe, etc.” (XXVII/38, 767).

This proximity between thinking and experience in “human affairs” also derives from this comparability in the relation to language and its figurative possibilities in the interaction with realms beyond visibility, evidence, and the empirical world. A more radical consequence of her

thesis that all thinking is transmitted than the necessity of establishing analogies, as Arendt finds it formulated in Kant, is the conception of a quasi-unsaid within language. If thinking, in order to signify the invisible, creates its concepts from the visible, as she formulated on the occasion of the readings of Blumenberg, then this linguistic transmission must necessarily fall short of the invisible. It is this problem that is responsible for some significant citations of Heidegger in the *Denktagebuch*:

*Ad* Heidegger interpretations: the new consists in the following: Heidegger not only assumes (as others did before him) that every work bears in itself a specific unspoken quality, but that this unspoken quality forms its essential core...thus quasi-empty, the space that lies in between, around which all things revolve and all else is organized. Heidegger positions himself in this place, in *the* middle of the work, where the author precisely is not, as if this were the *spared* space for the reader or listener. From here, the work re-transforms itself from the result-oriented, dead printed word into a living speech, open to the possibility of response and protest. It yields a dialogue, and hence the reader no longer comes from outside, but rather participates right in the thick of it. (XV/13, 353)

According to this view, here Heidegger's, the proximity between philosophy and literature is closest—and the distance to political philosophy largest. The dialogue of thinking becomes also a model of reading and the basis of a dialogical signature of Arendt's conception of philosophizing. Following such notes, the *Denktagebuch* also allows itself to be read as an accumulation of those reflections, which did *not* enter into Arendt's political writings, but which later generated the multi-volume project *The Life of the Mind* (posthumously published in 1978). This work formulates a theory of thinking, in which the thinking and writing style of the *Denktagebuch* is quasi-sublated [*gleichsam aufgehoben*].

### ***Love as Passion: Traces of Metaphors of the Heart***

The notes in the *Denktagebuch* also contain innumerable building blocks for a series of unwritten books. Perhaps most regrettable is that no work was written based upon the numerous notes on love, passion, and pathos, out of which a comprehensive philosophical critique of the emotions could have been established. Along this thematic trail, it is possible to observe in Arendt the ways in which thoughts consolidate, repeat, vary, and connect with other topics. Thus, an essay on "Love and Marriage" in the second of

the notebooks begins with a remarkable phrase: “Love is an event, which can become history or fate” (II/26, 49).

It is followed by a number of reflections on the disappearance of love as event. While marriage as an institution wastes this event, men and women each have their own manners of resistance: women make love into a feeling, and men transform it into a friendship. If the *Denktagebuch* contains several entries and poems, in which the named alternatives of fate [*Geschick*] and history [*Geschichte*] are concretized—whereby it is tempting to associate “fate” with Arendt’s relationship with Heidegger and “history” with Blücher—then this first monad toward a theory of passion or a critique of the emotions resonates over and over in several notes on the theme of love—in varied temporal rhythms, shorter and longer entries: in February 1951, for example, a note about the degeneration of passions (*pathos*) into emotions; in May 1951, a renewed reflection on the transformation of love into emotion, “in order to evade the power of love”; and in July of the same year, the problem of the concept of “emotion” is marked through quotation marks. All of these are variations, which finally in May 1953—after a span of thirteen full notebooks—flow out in an essay entitled “*Ad Love*.” Woven throughout the essay are the insights concerning love in Arendt’s theory of the “between” as the space of togetherness and public spirit:

Love is a power and not a feeling. It empowers the heart but it does not originate in the heart. It is a power of the universe, inasmuch as the universe is alive. It is the power of life and guarantees its process against death. For that reason love overcomes death. As long as the power of love has taken possession of a heart, it becomes power and eventually force. Love burns, penetrates like lightning the between [*das Zwischen*], i.e., the space [*Welt-Raum*] between people. (XVI/3, 372)

Although a number of these considerations are assumed in the theory of *Vita Activa*, the series of notes on love still marks the fascinating signature of those books that remained unwritten.

In the last quoted passage, the fragments of a theory of passion are connected with the very trace that marks the metaphor of the heart in the *Denktagebuch*. For it is striking that the word “heart,” as a kind of medium, links together the considerations about metaphor, the entries on love, and the poems. In Arendt’s own poems, the heart often appears as a metaphor for a feeling subject. So it is in the poem “Up life’s hill my life bundle”

that the heart—in the paradigm of conventional rhetoric on feeling—has the duty to acknowledge “homelessness as home” (II/21, 44–45). In the poem that begins with the verses “Two years in its tides/of hours and days fulfilled,” the “heart grown lonely” remains behind without companion (VII/24, 194); and in the poem “So is My Heart,” it is associated with corresponding images from nature: the moon draped with clouds of tears, the burning fireplace, and the crescent moon hanging in the firmament (XXII/1, 561). By contrast, in the poem that begins “Beating, my heart once beat out a path,” the heart represents metonymically the “I” and its life-trace, so that the subject appears as *subjectus*, which is subordinated to the facilitations of the beating heart (XXII/17, 568). The use of the *topos* of the heart in Arendt’s poetry follows a conventional lyrical, sentimental language, and is accompanied by notes associated with the motif of the metaphor, which examines the effectiveness of imagery [*des Bildes*]. So it is the metaphor of the heart through which Arendt reflects the “specific ambiguity of language [*eigentümliche Vieldeutigkeit der Sprache*],” and, using the example of the saying “to pour out one’s heart [*es öffnet sich mir das Herz*],” she discusses the reciprocal dependency of physical sensation and the meaning of images: “Only since I know the physical sensation. . . . But how would I have ever experienced the *truth* of physical sensation, if language with its metaphor had not already given me an inkling of the significance of the process?” (II/22, 46). And half a year later, it is the “Heart revived again” that Rilke describes in his last poem as “what is most dwelled in,” which Arendt cites as a testament to this experience (IV/10, 90).

The bodily nature of the metaphor of the heart leads Arendt to a reflection on the corporeal foundation of other figures of speech, such as rootlessness (II/10) or gentleness [*Sanftmut*] and dejection [*Schwer-mut*] (XXI/39). These reflections, which revolve around the literalness and embodiment of linguistic phrases, give themselves over to the very quasi-corporeal-spatial dimension of meaning in language, which time and again have provided the motive for the discussion of specific thinking and writing styles of German-speaking philosophy and cultural studies, and for what Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, for example, has analyzed as “the unconscious of language.”<sup>10</sup> The most significant is certainly an entry on the connection between renunciation [*Entsagung*] and un-saying

10. Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, *Als Freud das Meer sah: Freud und die deutsche Sprache* (Zürich: Ammann, 1999).

[*Ent-sagen*], which is reminiscent of the important incitement that Arendt derived for her theory of privacy as a sphere of sheltering [*Geborgenheit*] through Heidegger's talk of unconcealment [*Entbergung*]:

Freiburg, April 22, 1971  
Heidegger

Re-nouncing

←

→

*Ad* Saying—Being: The re-nouncing (like de-tracting) detracts that which is to be said from being and thereby un-says, i.e., returns it.

[*Ent-sagen*

←

→

*Ad* Sagen—Sein: Das *Ent-sagen* (wie *ent-nehmen*) entnimmt das zu *Sagende* von dem *Sein* und *ent-sagt* dabei, d.h. gibt es zurück.] (XXVII/7, 803)

# *Confession, Obedience, and Subjectivity: Michel Foucault's Unpublished Lectures On the Government of the Living\**

Jean-Michel Landry

Delivered at the Collège de France between January and March 1980, the lectures entitled *On the Government of the Living* (*Du gouvernement des vivants*) seem to be the missing piece in the Foucauldian puzzle. Still unpublished, those eleven lectures were intended to set the theoretical foundation for the book announced as the fourth and last volume of the *History of Sexuality*, under the title *Confessions of the Flesh* (*Les aveux de la chair*). This book, however, was never published, despite the fact that his editor described it as the keystone for the entire *History of Sexuality*.<sup>1</sup> The value of Michel Foucault's 1980 teachings is clear: first, their exegetic value, since they cast a new light on Foucault's philosophical journey, and more precisely on the movement of thought that led him to focus on Antiquity. But beyond the undeniable interest that they spark in the exegete, the value of these lectures is also resolutely political: the 1980 lectures attempt to relate the historical foundations of "our obedience"—which must be understood as the obedience of the Western subject. Foucault locates these foundations in the connections between obedience and confession within early Christianity. He even claims, in the last lecture, that the movement through which the subject discovers and reveals *what he*

\* This text is based on an integral transcription of the tape recordings of the lectures *On the Government of the Living*. The transcription was carried out between the June 14 and June 25, 2005, at the Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine (Caen, France) depository of Michel Foucault's archival fund. Another interpretation of these lectures was published in French as Jean-Michel Landry, "Généalogie politique de la psychologie," *Raisons Politiques* 25 no. 1 (2007): 31–45.

1. Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992), p. 323.



is constitutes one of the principal sources of his obedience.<sup>2</sup> In arriving at this conclusion, Foucault progresses meticulously: step by step, he locates each rift and crack, paying close attention to moments of crisis in order to establish a “genealogy” of confession, which is indeed a genealogy of obedience. In doing so, he endeavors to knock the injunction “Who are you?” off its modern pedestal in order to display it in all its frailty and contingency, as an innovation of the Christian West intended to guarantee men’s obedience.

This article does not claim to fully summarize the lectures entitled *On the Government of the Living*. Neither does it claim to cover the main points of the lectures, which form a complex network that would be difficult to synthesize, rich as it is in intuitions and avenues for research. The objective here is rather to map out the points of articulation needed to appreciate the political reach of the statement that ends the 1980 course: to confess, to seek to know, and to produce the truth concerning oneself, amounts to a submission.

### ***I. Writing the Political History of the Truth***

In the summary written for the *Annuaire du Collège de France*, Foucault clarifies the question that encompasses the eleven lectures delivered in 1980: “How is it that within Western Christian culture, the government of men requires, on the part of those who are led, in addition to acts of obedience and submission, ‘acts of truth,’ which have this particular character that not only is the subject required to speak truthfully, but to speak truthfully about himself?”<sup>3</sup> Although inoffensive in itself, in Foucault’s hands this question becomes a powerful lever for exposing the precariousness of the form of government that we have inherited from Christianity. While that is the initial ambition, it is however important to note that the lectures are part of a broader project: tracing the history of the power of the truth by

2. Frédéric Gros was the first to publish on the problematic of obedience in *On the Government of the Living*. See Frédéric Gros, “Introduction” in Frédéric Gros and Carlos Lévy, eds., *Foucault et la philosophie antique* (Paris: Kimé, 2004), pp. 7–13; Frédéric Gros, “Situation du cours,” in François Ewald et al., eds., *L’herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France, 1981–1982* (Paris: Gallimard—Le Seuil, 2001), pp. 489–526; Frédéric Gros, *Que sais-je ? Michel Foucault* (Paris: PUF, 1996); Frédéric Gros, “Le gouvernement de soi,” *Sciences Humaines* 3 (2005): 34–37.

3. For a translation of this summary, see Michel Foucault, “On the Government of the Living (1980),” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 154.

examining the relation that truth maintains with the various acts of subjectivation (practices of the self, self-examination, and self-transformation).<sup>4</sup> From the beginning of the opening lecture, Foucault states that his course represents one segment of a vast fresco intended to depict the political history of the truth.

While the overall project may appear colossal, the segment to which Foucault consecrated his annual lectures has a more precise focus. The object of the course, the leading thread that he uses to unearth some of the roots of Western obedience, is the practice of confession. But more precisely, it is the emergence and gradual development of “reflexive acts of truth”<sup>5</sup>—of which confession represents the current form—that provides the vital lead of the 1980 lectures. And since no history can be written *ex nihilo*, Foucault locates the beginnings and subsequent history of confession within a precise framework: the first Christian institutions. The lectures rapidly take the form of a detailed narrative on the shifts, hesitations, and bumps on the road of the discourse on the self within the institutions of early Christianity between the second and fifth centuries of the common era. It is through the course of this story, or rather through the succession of discontinuities within it, that Foucault attempts to shed light on the way in which “Western man had saddled himself with the obligation to manifest the truth about *what he is*”<sup>6</sup> (my emphasis).

From beginning to end, therefore, the 1980 lectures remain rigorously faithful to the Foucauldian method of analysis known as “genealogy.” On the theoretical level, however, the course creates some significant displacements. From the outset, Foucault specifies that he has modified his approach: this time, he does not intend to study “acts of truth” using the usual “power/knowledge”<sup>7</sup> framework. Instead, he will use the more operational pair of “government/truth.” To justify such a displacement, Foucault argues that the truth revealed by the primary forms of confession largely exceeds the sum of knowledge necessary and useful to the exercise

4. On this specific point, see: Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

5. By “reflexive acts of truth,” Foucault means the forms of revelation whereby one must verbalize the truth about oneself.

6. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, February 6 lecture.

7. This approach has guided the philosophical investigation initiated with the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

of power. The relation that is established between truth and government cannot be reduced to the relationship of utility that prevails between power and knowledge. In this regard, *On the Government of the Living* appears to be an occasion for Foucault to point out that the exercise of power and the revelation of truth historically have been bound together since well before the appearance of the modern State.<sup>8</sup>

The 1980 lectures are structured around the three main discontinuities identified by Foucault in the history of acts of truth, as it unfolds between the second and fifth centuries: (1) the modifications brought by Tertullian to baptismal procedures, (2) the development of canonical penitence, and (3) the appearance of a directing of Christian conscience.

## ***II. Tertullian's Redefinition of Baptism: The Christian Soul Becomes an Object of Knowledge***

In Foucault's view, the first steps toward confession can be found in a certain "inflection" that took place in Christianity between the second and third centuries. The shift followed a series of modifications in baptismal procedures introduced by the writings of Tertullian.<sup>9</sup> Foucault begins his long genealogy with the institution of baptism because he sees in it the first link between the individual revelation of truth and forgiveness for sins. Even in its most archaic form, baptism allowed for a preparation during which postulants received teachings. Each postulant had to appropriate a number of truths that they would be asked to express thereafter—during the "profession of faith." It was only when the truth was firmly anchored inside the subject that the baptismal functions of purification could produce an effect. Thus, through baptism, a person is marked as belonging to God, is born again, and through the purification of his soul is placed in the light.<sup>10</sup>

8. Regarding the first ties between political power and the obligations of truth, see Michel Foucault "Pastoral Power and the Political Reason," in *Religion and Culture*, pp. 135–52.

9. Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225) is regarded as the first Western theologian and the main protagonist of the conversion of the Latin world to Christianity. Foucault refers to his writings on baptism (*De Baptismo*) and on penitence (*De Patientia*). Tertullian, *On Baptism* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004); Tertullian, *Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1958). One can also find these treatises on The Tertullian Project Web site at <http://www.tertullian.org>.

10. Here Foucault refers to a text named "Didascalía" that is "the teaching of the twelve apostles and other disciples, an ecclesiastical document of the third century." In

On the threshold of the third century, the relationship between “purification” and “truth” was entirely reconceptualized. Foucault describes it as a crucial event in the history of Western subjectivity. It proceeds from the major overhaul of baptismal procedures initiated under the influence of Tertullian. What interests Foucault here (what he sees behind the overhaul) are the first roots of the process by which Western man recognizes himself as an “object of knowledge.” But first, Foucault insists on the historical necessity that lay behind this reorganization. In his view, Tertullian’s efforts were directed against a number of sects that were contesting the effectiveness of baptism—the Gnostics, for instance. Foucault also stresses that Tertullian was trying to uproot a series of “negative attitudes” that were spreading throughout Christian institutions. Some of these attitudes led postulants to neglect repentance and other forms of punishment, claiming that baptism would wash away their sins. In order to counteract this non-observance and to contain the influence of Gnosticism, Tertullian made deep-seated changes to baptism.

Foucault identifies three types of changes. Through the first displacement, preparation for baptism no longer was intended to teach about and initiate believers into the Truth; instead, it fulfilled a function of purification. The postulant *ipso facto* became the operator of his own purification since thereafter he had to appear before God in a purified state. More generally, Foucault shows that the whole baptismal institution underwent an inversion in the relationship between purification and truth: “In preceding systems, it was the truth, the progressive constitution of the subject of knowledge, which ensured purification. Now purification must be accomplished before the moment of illumination; with Tertullian, it is purification which leads to the truth,” and not the other way around.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, and through a second displacement, Tertullian made the preparation for baptism the core of all baptismal procedures. Baptism thus appeared as a long process of purification that led the postulant to the Truth. As Foucault notes, this process was punctuated by a series of exercises of maturation and improvement intended to ascertain how the applicant’s soul was transformed as he progressed toward the Truth. The third and last displacement

the summary in the Directory of the Collège of France, he refers to the following edition: *Constitutions apostoliques: Didascalie, c’est-à-dire l’enseignement catholique des douze apôtres et des saints disciples de Notre Sauveur*, trans. Abbé F. Nau (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1902).

11. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, February 13 lecture.

occurred when Tertullian introduced into the universe of Christian thought the idea according to which Satan has resided in the souls of all men since the fall. From then on, the central function of baptism would be to ward off the satanic element lurking in the inscrutable depths of the Christian's soul.

As a result of these three displacements, but also because of the new conceptions they conveyed, the representation of baptism underwent a major upheaval. Roughly speaking, baptism went from being thought of as training to being approached as a test: baptism became a combat, an exercise, an ascetics, and a ceaseless fight to break Satan's grip on the human soul. Baptism was henceforth imbued with fear. With Tertullian, baptism became a true discipline of penitence, according to Foucault; it became a ceaseless labor whose sole aim was to turn the soul away from evil and train it to fight against the insidious attacks of the devil. This total revolution in the conception of baptism inaugurated, according to Foucault, an episode of capital importance in the history of the links between subjectivity and truth in the West. Indeed, a new procedure was needed to fulfill the new requirement for continuous struggle in the postulant's progression toward truth: "the manifestation of the truth by the soul itself."<sup>12</sup> Until that point, baptism required from the soul the expression of an external Truth, taught during the preparation to baptism; henceforth, on account of the struggle, the soul would be encouraged to show "its own truth" as the applicant was initiated into the Truth. One thus witnesses, Foucault says, an interlacing between the initiation rites of baptism and the procedures leading to the manifestation of the truth<sup>13</sup>.

This interlacing reached its concrete form in the "catechumenate." Indeed, the baptismal preparation (which punctuated the journey of the "catechumens") included a series of procedures aiming "to authenticate, to verify, the process of transformation of the soul that baptism sanctions by the forgiveness of sins."<sup>14</sup> As the catechumen slowly progressed toward Truth, he was encouraged to manifest the truth hidden in his soul, all the while specifying the state of the struggle (against Satan) taking place within it. With the catechumenate institution, Foucault sees the human

12. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, February 20 lecture.

13. "I don't say the enunciation of sins is fundamental: I employ a much more imprecise and obscure expression. I say that manifestation of the truth is necessary and is deeply connected with this status of penance." Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self," in *Religion and Culture*, p. 171.

14. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, February 20 lecture.

soul as being placed in a process that constitutes it not only as a subject of knowledge, but also as an object of knowledge. Behind Tertullian's requirement ("never lead the soul to the Truth without having paid the cost for this access to the Truth, that is the demonstration of its proper truth"<sup>15</sup>), which the catechumenate takes up and puts into practice, Foucault detects the seeds of the process that led human beings to perceive themselves as objects of possible knowledge. Although this process of objectivation of the self was not subjected to constraints and obligations until the advent of "canonical penitence," the displacements operated by Tertullian nonetheless reveal the birth of the possibility of expressing a truth about oneself. Later, this possibility would provide confession with the conditions for its existence.

***III. The Introduction of Canonical Penitence:  
The Appearance of the Obligation of Reflexive Truth***

The second great discontinuity that Foucault examines is the one that gave rise to what is known as "canonical" penitence. In contrast to former baptismal procedures, canonical penitence was for Christians who, following baptism, tarnished their souls by committing a sin. Here, Foucault shows that the introduction of this practice disrupted anew the balance between subjectivity and truth, while creating a break in the history of penitence. Prior to canonical penitence, the catechumenate regarded penitence only as an ingredient needed to prepare for baptism. And since baptism could in no case be reiterated, the possibility of a second penitence remained rigorously excluded.

With the introduction of "canonical penitence" began a new era in penitential practices. Once more, before expounding the details of the displacement introduced by the advent of this new ritual, Foucault takes care to describe the historical context in which it took place. One learns that this context was marked by the advent of "relapsed heretics," a group of individuals who had abjured their Christian faith under the pressure of persecution and thus had severed their relationship with the Truth. Faced with the multiplication of such heretics, Christianity had to redefine the problem of relapse. In short, Christians had to answer the following question: "What happens to an individual who has consolidated his fundamental tie with the Truth through baptism and then falls out of that relationship, when

15. Ibid.

he falls again into sin? What happens when he breaks with the Truth?”<sup>16</sup> Obviously, the problem of penitence is one of choice: can the act that saves and illuminates be repeated?

Canonical penitence was Christianity’s answer to the problem raised by the multiplication of relapsed heretics. The introduction of a “post-baptismal” penitence allowed sinners—relapsed heretics first and foremost—to atone for their sins and renew their relationship with the Truth. Canonical penitence, however, does not work as a second baptism: only the penitence procedures that took place during baptism preparation could be repeated. Moreover, Foucault shows that between the introduction of canonical penitence and the advent of the direction of conscience, post-baptismal penitence was offered only once. And this second penitence was heavily supervised: the penitents formed an order (parallel to the catechumenate); they were subjected to various prohibitions and had to bear the mark of their second penitence their whole lives. What interests Foucault here, within the austere journey imposed on the penitents, is once more the innovations regarding acts of truth. He sees in them a new inflection in the relationships between subjectivity and truth. Throughout their penitential journey, Christians were subjected to a set of procedures that forced them to regularly express truths about themselves. Of course the catechumenal institution also included procedures relating to reflexive acts of truth. These procedures, however, did not have “their own status,”<sup>17</sup> neither did they constitute an obligation nor occur with regularity. With canonical penitence, on the other hand, a variety of techniques “intended to encourage, exhort or constrain penitents to show their truth”<sup>18</sup> were put in place. Christianity called these techniques “exomologesis.”<sup>19</sup>

Although exomologesis was not yet a verbal confession, Foucault shows that it represented the very first obligation of reflexive truth—the first requirement relating to the manifestation of a truth about oneself. As

16. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, February 27 lecture.

17. Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, March 5 lecture.

18. Ibid.

19. “What does this term *exomologesis* mean? In a very general sense, the word refers to the recognition of an act, but more precisely, in the penitential rite, what was the *exomologesis*? Well, at the end of the penitential procedure... when the moment of the reintegration came, an episode took place which the texts regularly call exomologesis. [Exomologesis] is the dramatic manifestation of the renunciation to oneself.” Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self,” in *Religion and Culture*, pp. 171–73.



such, exomologesis represented an important historical formation in the development of “reflexive acts of truth.” Not only did it pave the way for the practice of confession, but it also laid the foundation for the command “Tell me who you are.” Indeed, the 1980 lectures can be read as a serious charge against the timeless status attached to the command to speak about ourselves. This accusation, however, is not a simple attempt to undermine beliefs; rather than a nihilist deconstruction, it is a political work. If Foucault seeks to undermine the requirement to confess, it is because it carries power effects: it is seen as a permanent feature of Western forms of government and as a root of obedience. Mapping out history to better undermine? Not exactly. Mapping out history to disarm.

#### ***IV. Organizing the Direction of Conscience: Binding Confession to Obedience***

According to Foucault, the organization of the direction of conscience marks a third turning point in the historical development of obligations of truth. Here we find the first processes for speaking of the self. But before describing them, Foucault steps back for a moment. He reminds his audience that neither the practices linked to baptism nor those associated with canonical penitence required subjects to formulate a truth about themselves: they were not asked to speak their truth; they were asked to manifest it. Moreover, none of these practices compelled Christians either to examine or to analyze themselves. Like the catechumenate which preceded it, exomologesis required from the subject a revelation of truth in which verbal expression was negligible and analytical effort absent. The analytical verbalization of confession would be integrated into the procedures of canonical penitence only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In order to follow closely the development of the first practices of verbal confession, Foucault makes a slight shift in his analytical focus. Turning away from baptismal and penitential institutions, he focuses on the rituals imposed in the first Christian monasteries. It is there, in what surrounds the direction of conscience developed during the fourth century, that Foucault watches for innovations concerning confessional practices. First of all, he points out the emergence of an “iterative penitence,” a continually renewable penitential process. But above all, he draws attention to a new linkage between the procedures of verbal confession and the techniques of introspection and self-examination. According to Foucault, this linkage is decisive: not only did it give birth to the practice of exhaustive

and permanent confession, but it also sketched out what became the Christian's, and more generally the Western individual's, subjectivity.

Of course, the junction between self-examination and self-expression responds to specific historical necessities, which Foucault describes. He points out that from its origin, monachism was intended to fight against the wave of zeal that disturbed Christian ascetic practice between the third and fourth centuries. Through the monastic institution, Christianity sought to show that Salvation did not require a state of perfection, but rather a work of continual improvement. This is why John Cassian<sup>20</sup> introduced the requirement of "discretion," which urged cenobites to avoid all forms of excess, without however falling into idleness. However, because of satanic presences that disturb the Christian soul, monks remained strictly unable to attain the ascetic equilibrium required by monastic "discretion" on their own. Since the Evil spirit was suspected of directing satanic thoughts toward the Christian's soul under the guise of Good, the Christian subject would never be able to be his own judge. The Christian's self-relationship is henceforth haunted by suspicion. A space of permanent doubt has slipped between him and himself. If the cenobite cannot himself find a "happy medium" that fulfills the requirement of discretion in the work of improvement, it is because something hidden lies at the bottom of his soul, like a secret dissimulated by illusion. The Christian subject, Foucault says, is blind to himself.

To compensate for the monk's lack of discernment and to overcome the illusion that keeps him prisoner, monachism offers a single solution: to compel the subject to confess his thoughts to a director to whom he owes unconditional obedience. This new constraint gave birth to "exagoreusis"—a technique of confession that aims to verbalize all that lies hidden in the deepest darkest recesses of the soul. Foucault makes three observations regarding this new obligation of truth. First, he notices that as a monologue on oneself, exagoreusis implies a practice of introspection: it is

20. John Cassian (ca. 350–aft. 432) was one of the principal theorists of monachism. Foucault refers to the two principal works that still exist: *Institutions cénobitiques* (Paris: Éditions Du Cerf, 1965); *Conférences* (Paris: Éditions Du Cerf, 1966–1971). Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 946. "For a translation of Cassian's work, see *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: W. M. B. Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 201–545. Foucault, "On the Government of the Living (1980)," in *Religion and Culture*, p. 155.

only through examination of and permanent vigilance over one's thoughts that the monk can sort out the satanic and the divine ideas that come to him. Second, he remarks that exagoreusis does not target the subject's actions, but his thoughts. This process concerns the imperceptible movements of the mind; its "permanent mobility."<sup>21</sup> Finally, Foucault points out that this new verbalization technique cannot be dissociated from the relationship of complete obedience that binds the cenobite to his master/director. Confession not only requires a director, but also a complete, permanent, and unconditional subjection by the monk to the director's orders. The obedience characteristic of the direction of conscience demands that the subject firmly renounce his will.<sup>22</sup> It is only insofar as exagoreusis relies on a relationship of infinite obedience that the Christian can escape the illusion of the Devil and cease to be misled by his solipsistic examination. To do so, however, confession must be done regularly and in as much detail as possible on each occasion.

Behind the doors of the first monasteries, Foucault sees a major displacement: the act of confession became linked to a requirement of permanent obedience. "Obeying in all things" and "keeping no secret thoughts": from that point on, these two principles would form a single requirement. Furthermore, this dual imperative introduced a fundamental break between the direction of Christian conscience and its ancestor, ancient philosophical direction. Unlike Christian direction, ancient direction remained provisional. Its role was limited to accompanying the person being directed until he became independent. The obedience required from the subject in the ancient world was instrumental: it was limited in time and subordinated to the objective of autonomy. In Foucault's view, monachism inverted in every respect the ways in which ancient techniques of direction functioned. The Christian direction of conscience would be ongoing and would consider obedience no longer as a means, but as an end

21. "This is the soul that Cassian described with two Greek words [indecipherable]. It means that the soul is always moving and moving in all directions." Michel Foucault, *Howison Lectures at Berkeley, California* on October 20–21, 1980. Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self," in *Religion and Culture*, p. 171.

22. "There is an adage, very well known in the monastic literature, which says, "everything that one does not do on order of one's director, or everything that one does without his permission, constitutes a theft." Therefore, obedience is a permanent relationship, and even when the monk is old, even when he became, in his turn, a master, even then he has to keep the spirit of obedience as a permanent sacrifice of his own will." Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self," in *Religion and Culture*, p. 174.

in itself (obedience generated obedience). Obedience, within monachism, sought only to root obedience ever more deeply within the subject.

### *V. Politics of Confession*

Within Christianity, obedience works as both a condition and an objective of the direction of conscience. As he examines and verbalizes his thoughts in an effort to escape Satan's trickery, the cenobite is surreptitiously placed in a position of complete obedience toward his master. This movement deserves closer attention because several elements are intertwined here. Foucault first shows that the Christian subject is hidden from himself: access to his own "truth" is troubled by suspicion and locked by the fear of being misled by Satan. To reach the "truth" of *what he is*, the cenobite must submit to a moral authority and obey him unconditionally. In other words, the Christian's hermeneutic self-relationship becomes clear and decipherable only through a relationship of submission. The Christian subject, Foucault says, can produce the truth about himself only if he submits himself and renounces his will.

The political device behind the obligation to reveal the truth about oneself is laid bare. If Christianity instructs the subject to know himself, if it forces him to examine and verbalize *what he is*, it is because that quest will make him a subjected subject. By demanding that the Christian speak the truth about himself, he is forced on a quest that can only be undertaken from a position that brings him into subjection—since the relationship of the subject to his own "truth" is mediated by an Other, and this Other requires submission and dependency. Behind confession lies a political technology of obedience. And behind this persistent representation—according to which we have a blind spot, a secret, hidden place within ourselves that requires a continual deepening—can be detected the traces of a struggle and a will to subjugate and to control the subject. At the beginning of the lectures, Foucault questioned the notable presence of obligations of truth and obedience within our form of government. The genealogy that he traced throughout the eleven lectures offers a partial answer: it is by requiring certain "acts of truth" from its subjects that the Christian West was able to guarantee the "acts of obedience" necessary to the "government of the living." Final point of the analysis: far from being age-old, the imperative of confession has an origin, a history, and even a political function: to subject the individual by requiring him to survey the moving sands of his own "truth."

In a conference lecture delivered at Dartmouth College in 1980, Foucault emphasized the urgency of politicizing the relationship to the self. He considered one political task a priority: inventing techniques of the self that could define our self-relationship in terms other than those of self-knowledge. In short, he strove to find ways to cease viewing ourselves as an identity to uncover or as a psychology to decipher. This task, Foucault said, is a matter of rethinking “the politics of ourselves.”<sup>23</sup> The movement of thought that led him to read the Ancients needs to be understood as part of this goal.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

# *Confessions of the Self: Foucault and Augustine*

Thomas Lynch

Michel Foucault's analysis of the constitution of the modern subject poses provocative philosophical and theological questions about the relationship between structures of power, practices of domination, and the subjects that they discipline. His problematization of the self proposes to illuminate Christianity's transmission, if not invention, of forms of self-knowledge and reflexive acts of truth that leave Christian subjects (understood in both senses of the term) open to the panoptical disciplines of the state, market, and other structures that dominate through normalization. Even if one disagrees with his thesis that the teachings and practices of early Christianity are integral to the development of the Western, modern subject, it is possible to accept his notion of governmentality. If Christianity is not culpable, or at least not in the sense suggested by Foucault, an alternative governmentality can be imagined through the resources of the Christian tradition.

I will critically engage with this area of Foucault's work in four movements. First, these ideas will be situated in regard to his earlier work and in terms of his overarching project to develop a "history of the present."<sup>1</sup> Second, I will re-examine confessional practices as described by Foucault, attempting to bridge historical gaps and questioning his refusal to account for the theological beliefs of confessants and confessors. In order to explain how the disciplines of cloistered religious communities came to be central for the functioning of Western societies, I will employ the work of Talal

1. Foucault often characterized his project as a history of the present. He was not interested in writing about the past for the past's sake but in "writing a history of the past in terms of the present." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 31.

Asad and Jeremy Tambling. Third, I will show how Foucault's genealogy mistakes stoic elements within the writings of John Cassian as normative for Christian theology and practice. In response, I will offer an Augustinian understanding of the self, demonstrating the consequences of these stoic elements. Finally, through this Augustinian alternative, I will be able both to affirm Foucault's problematization of the modern, Western subject and to offer a rival understanding that refuses disciplines characterized by domination.

Before going further, it is necessary to address the usage of the terms "self" and "subject." Foucault never develops a hard distinction between the two, though Mark Poster has argued that a close reading reveals "that 'self' is a neutral, ahistorical term, almost a synonym for 'individual'" and "'[s]ubject' is an active, historical term that refers to a process of interiorization."<sup>2</sup> I maintain Poster's distinction throughout this paper, though in the understanding of Augustine it is difficult to distinguish between the self and the subject.

### *Contextualizing the Problematization of the Self*

The most widely accepted schematization of Foucault's work consists of three methodological periods: archaeology (1954–69), genealogy (1970–75), and ethics of the self (1976–84).<sup>3</sup> Or, more precisely, one might describe these periods as focusing on "an archaeology of discourse," "a genealogy of power relations," and "a problematization of ethics."<sup>4</sup> While this outline is helpful, it is important to note that each period is characterized by a methodological priority and does not exclude the conclusions or methods of previous periods. As Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow note: "*There is no pre- and post-archaeology or genealogy in Foucault.*"<sup>5</sup>

In this division, 1976 is a crucial year for Foucault's work on religion. While he addresses the role of religion from the outset of his project, and it is arguable that there are subtextual religious issues throughout his work, it was during this final phase that he most explicitly addressed religion. This

2. Mark Poster, "Foucault and the Tyranny of Greece," in David Couzens Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 212.

3. Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 9–24.

4. Gary Gutting, "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 2.

5. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 104 (emphasis theirs).



focus is crucial for his problematization of ethics, in which there are three major themes: the role of Christianity in the development of the Western subject, “technologies of the self,” and “governmentality.” One might take the publishing of the first volume of his three-volume *History of Sexuality* as a sign of this shift in his thought. The well-known three volumes were to be followed by a fourth, initially intended to be published second, that was written but never published. Entitled *Confessions of the Flesh*, it explored the relationship between confessional practices in Christianity, obedience, and the emergence of the Western subject. Foucault described these confessional practices as “technologies of the self.” In his lectures at the University of Vermont in 1982, he explained that there are four major technologies: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self. Technologies of the self are those

which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.<sup>6</sup>

Looking back at his earlier work, Foucault critiqued it as too focused on technologies of power alone. He was shifting to an investigation of how the exercise of power relies on the constitution of particular selves. There is, then, an important relationship between technologies of power and technologies of the self. Foucault calls this connection “governmentality.”<sup>7</sup> His study of confession is an investigation into the governmentality arising out of an understanding of the subject that emerges from the Christian tradition. This subject figures heavily in the normalizing structures of Western society that Foucault challenges.

### ***Re-examining Confession: Historical Gaps and Theological Omissions***

A major issue for Foucault’s project is explaining the possible connections between the disciplines of monasticism and the disciplines of modern

6. Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988), p. 18.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

societies. Foucault's genealogy of the subject ends without accounting for the obvious difficulties that arise in secularizing monastic disciplines. Only by establishing a link is it possible to understand how this technology of power is co-opted by the nation, the market, or other structures of domination. In this regard, Talal Asad's work on Christianity is a helpful supplement to Foucault. In his discussion of changes in the Church's deployment of discipline, he offers a slightly different angle of inspection and draws possible connections between religious asceticism and the body as a location of truth, a theme important to Foucault. Reading Asad along with Jeremy Tambling helps to advance Foucault's thesis and to situate his work on early Christianity in the larger narrative of the transition from ecclesial discipline to the discipline of modern structures of power.

Asad outlines the transition from monasticism to the initial "state" adoption of these technologies in three stages. In the first stage, "the monastic community is the pre-eminent locus of Christian religiosity, and thus of the disciplinary practices for developing Christian virtues by which the Christian self is to be formed."<sup>8</sup> Characteristic of this period is the programmatic ordering of activities of a defined, enclosed community. The second stage is marked by "a growing concern on the part of ecclesial authorities with the religiosity of lay Christians, and this is reflected in attempts to develop strategies for disciplining an increasingly mobile, affluent and heterogeneous population."<sup>9</sup> This period coincides with the end of Foucault's historical survey of confessional practices. Here confession becomes the sacrament of penance and is routinely practiced by both laity and clergy. Hinted at by Asad, missed by Foucault, but addressed by Tambling, is the way this period marks increased centralization of clerical authority.<sup>10</sup> This concentration of power occurs in the context of the Church's struggles against heresy and efforts at defining the virtuous life in the midst of social changes for the clergy and the Christian population. This stage ends with the "emergence and consolidation of secular states, the Protestant Reformation, and the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century."<sup>11</sup>

8. Talal Asad, "On Ritual and Discipline in Medieval Christian Monasticism," *Economy and Society* 16, no. 2 (1987): 160.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, The Subject* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), p. 38.

11. Asad, "On Ritual and Discipline," p. 160.

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 occurred during this period and its effects help explain the relationship between the second and the third stages in Asad's historical outline. "Since (sacramental) confession had now fully emerged as the universal discipline for creating the truthful conscience, it is not surprising that (judicial) confession should be recognized as the specific technique for proving heresy."<sup>12</sup> Foucault briefly touches ecclesial discipline's influence on judicial proceedings in *Discipline and Punish*, but he never draws out the implications of this connection in his work on technologies of the self.

The third stage is the site of a crucial shift in disciplinary practices and warrants quoting at length. This period

overlaps in time with that of the second, and serves to highlight by contrast the distinctive features of the latter. The disciplinary strategies of the Renaissance princes are at once similar to and different from those employed by the Church. Their conception of power is more modest but more effective than the Church's: not to fashion Christian subjectivities but to govern loyal subjects. Conduct interests them far more than belief, and belief largely when it becomes a political emblem (as in the early Christian communities). The princes borrow disciplinary techniques from the church—administrative institutions, inquisitorial procedures, penal sanctions, etc.—and seek to adapt them to their own political strategies. It is in this political environment that the formation of the self increasingly becomes the object of strategies of *self*-formation.<sup>13</sup>

Neither Foucault nor Asad spends time developing this last stage. Tambling's literary study encompasses this period, but is not concerned with these specific changes. These transitions, the analysis of which lies outside the boundaries of this essay, remains a crucial issue for those who wish to chart the relationship between confession as an ecclesial discipline and the discipline of the modern state, market, etc.

Despite the changes in confessional practices, the understanding of how these practices bring out or reveal truth remained largely constant, though Asad and Foucault disagree at this point. For Asad the confession of sin allowed the penitent to recognize the truth about him or herself

12. Asad, "Note on Body Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual," *Economy and Society* 12, no. 3 (1983): 299.

13. Asad, "On Ritual and Discipline," pp. 160–61.

through collaboration with the confessor.<sup>14</sup> For Foucault, however, the truth is produced in the act of confession. It “is not that the master knows the truth. . . . It is the confession, the verbal act of confession, which comes last and which makes appear, in a certain sense, by its own mechanics, the truth, the reality of what has happened.”<sup>15</sup>

The issue between confession and truth, while it may be discussed in terms of governmentality, was a theological issue for the monastic communities under consideration. Here we see a key weakness of Foucault’s arguments: his abstraction of religious practices from theological beliefs. This abstraction allows him to construct an understanding of religion on his own terms. Ironically, his theory proceeds by the very logic of normalization that he purports; Foucault cannot envision technologies of power that are not reducible to domination. It is as if the beliefs of *confessional* communities are superfluous and may be peeled away to reveal raw networks of power relations beneath. He normalizes theological belief by reducing it to a grammar of power. This logic causes Foucault to miss key points about the nature of confessional practices.

Asad makes a similar point in noting that

while Foucault seems to concentrate his attention entirely on a “microcosm of solitude,” these famous “steps of humility” are precisely enmeshed in social relationships, relationships which are not simply a setting but a means. In the dominant form of medieval monasticism (cenobitic as opposed to eremitic) the technology of the self, which lies at the heart of the combat for chastity, is itself dependent on the institutional resources of organised community life. The inspection and disengagement of the will which Foucault describes so brilliantly take place within the stuff of monastic life guided by the abbot.<sup>16</sup>

Further, Asad realizes the slippage involved in the term body. The body is a site of truth, as both Foucault and Asad would state, but within these communities “the body which Foucault identified as the arena for that continuous labour of inspecting and testing may now be seen to be the monastic body as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Foucault does not realize the

14. Asad, “Note on Body Pain and Truth,” p. 305.

15. Michel Foucault, “About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Self,” in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 178.

16. Asad, “Note on Body Pain and Truth,” p. 313.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

extent to which the power relations he describes are actually a complex network of relations. “In this area there is no longer a single point of surveillance from which the self examines itself, but an entire network of functions through which watching, testing, learning, teaching, can take place.”<sup>18</sup>

The abstraction of practices from beliefs also affects Foucault’s understanding of obedience. Foucault cannot seem to move past the idea that obedience is an end itself, quoting as an example the maxim favored by Cassian: “Everything the monk does without permission of his master constitutes a theft.”<sup>19</sup> Asad, on the other hand, recognizes the relation between obedience and humility and the centrality of these to the monastic virtuous life: “Monastic rites are analysed in relation to programmes for forming or re-forming moral dispositions (that is, for organising the physical and verbal practices that constitute the virtuous Christian self), and in particular, the disposition to true obedience.”<sup>20</sup>

Foucault’s misunderstanding of the nature of Christian obedience stems in part from his misunderstanding of the nature of monastic technologies of power. It is important to note here that his technologies of power do not imply coercion. Yet, he seems to describe the relationship between the abbot and the monastic community as one person dominating other persons. While this domination may not necessitate coercion, it does imply a kind of violence within the political structure of monasteries that is antithetical to the beliefs of both monks and abbots. This description colors the relationships within the monastic community and misses the point made by Elizabeth Clark, that “no divine or ecclesiastical law, no pastoral authority, required this striving for a special excellence above and beyond the precepts all Christians were expected to observe; it was a self imposed restriction.”<sup>21</sup>

It is only in the context of this striving that one can accurately understand the role of obedience. Asad describes this particular functioning of obedience by referencing the language of desire used by Bernard of Clairvaux: “From being masters or equals of human lovers (male or female), they must now learn to become humble subjects of a heavenly

18. Ibid.

19. Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” p. 44.

20. Asad, “On Ritual and Discipline,” pp. 164–65.

21. Elizabeth A. Clark, “Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54, no. 4 (1988): 635.

Lover. The transformation thus culminates in an unconditional subjection to the Law, in desire becoming the *will to obey God*—the supreme Christian virtue.”<sup>22</sup> Asad, however, misses the point that this humbling is not only constitutive of the relationship between God and the believer, but becomes constitutive of the broader Christian ethic.

Asad is able to present a more nuanced understanding of the role of the abbot and obedience, one which is open to the Augustinian understanding of the relationship between will and desire that we will turn to in the next section. Again referencing Bernard, he explains that the monk’s responsibility was to obey the rule. The abbot, however, had the additional responsibility of guiding the monastic community in proper observance of the rule: “In this role, the abbot is also entitled to absolute obedience from his monks, because in the monastery he is Christ’s representative.”<sup>23</sup> Bernard emphasizes that in “following a prescription, the monk is therefore expressing the same will as the abbot’s in issuing it—the will to obey God’s Law.”<sup>24</sup>

While Asad helpfully corrects oversights in Foucault, we still have not made the connection between the medieval and the modern. Their work remains focused on the first stage of the historical outline mentioned above. To make this transition, let us turn to two additional sources: first, Jeremy Tambling’s literary study of confession illuminates the importance of Protestantism in transforming confession to a technology that may be adopted by the state. Second, Michael Hanby’s work on Augustine and modernity shows how stoic ideas, transmitted through monasticism to Descartes, influence the secularization of confessional practices into tools of domination.

Picking up where the historical narratives of Foucault and Asad drop off, Tambling demonstrates the importance of Protestantism in transitioning from monasticism to the governmentalities of Western societies. Protestant confessional practices mark a radical internalization in which the study becomes the new confessional.<sup>25</sup> Discussing the writings of Protestant preachers such as John Bunyan, Tambling states: “The fit between the presence of the book . . . and the writing of journals, diaries and spiritual confessional autobiographies is complete; in the space of the silent study

22. Asad, “On Ritual and Discipline,” p. 175.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Tambling, *Confession*, p. 96.

the reader becomes the confessant.”<sup>26</sup> With Protestantism the confessant and confessor become one.

Tambling characterizes the historical development of confession as moving in the direction of alienation and self-gratification. Confession is something practiced in private for one’s own benefit, discipline, and enjoyment. Analyzing confession in Lacanian terms, he writes:

[I]t defines the confessant’s exclusive, private nature, and it condemns them to an alienation from their own feelings: refusing to let them own them, save in the discourse of the other. It also provides a substitute for the ideal object: indeed, while it substitutes for the pleasure of the deed after the deed is done, it also supplements the deed to be confessed, for no deed is truly done till it is told, as no perfect murder can be committed without the murderer wishing to tell.<sup>27</sup>

Foucault draws attention to what he terms “pastoral power” to explain an individualization that matches the privatization described by Tambling. This exercise of power is uniquely situated to discipline individuals and “intend[s] to rule them in a continuous and permanent way.”<sup>28</sup> In departure from previous understandings of political rule, the pastor or shepherd ruled not the community but individuals. In order to effectively rule, he requires knowledge of each individual. Each individual member of the “flock” must bow in complete obedience to the power that knows each one. In return, the pastor is willing to sacrifice himself for the flock.<sup>29</sup> The emergence of the police state eclipsed the pastoral nature of this power while maintaining techniques for disciplining and knowing the individual.<sup>30</sup>

With this privatization and individualization, we have arrived at a kind of panoptical discipline in which the confessant confesses to himself, receiving absolution from a God who functions as the Lacanian big Other. Tambling sees his narrative as similar to Foucault’s: the story of the “fabrication” of the subject. This particular subject, that of Foucault and Tambling, is unmistakably modern. To better understand the importance of this characterization we now turn to Michael Hanby’s thesis that

26. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

28. Michel Foucault, “Pastoral Power and Political Reason,” in *Religion and Culture*, p. 136.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–43.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 145.



monasticism unwittingly transmitted stoic influences that reach all the way to Descartes.

***Stoicism and the Monastic Tradition: An Augustinian Response***

Hanby's *Augustine and Modernity* is a defense of Augustine against charges of proto-Cartesianism and complicity in the development of the modern subject. He draws contrasts between John Cassian, the same monastic writer discussed by Foucault, and his contemporary Augustine of Hippo. Hanby explains how the synthesis between incongruent Augustinian and Cassianite theologies developed and became influential through the papacy of Gregory the Great. Gregory retained stoic notions of obedience and an emphasis on the "priority of *discretio*."<sup>31</sup> It is this same *discretio* that Foucault talks about at some length in regard to the examination of inner thoughts, leading to a form of self-knowledge that he sees as instrumental in the development of the modern self.<sup>32</sup>

For Cassian *discretio* is the starting point of all virtue, for even prayer or fasting, if not motivated by God, can be sin. Foucault finds this discipline of self-examination central to the shift between ancient Greece and Rome, and the early Christians.<sup>33</sup> The monk does not reflect on his actions but investigates the origins of his thoughts. Cassian employed a number of metaphors to explain this process. Foucault's favorite is the money changer who inspects the quality of the coin, its inscription, and its metal in order to verify its authenticity.<sup>34</sup> The monk must determine the metal of his thoughts before affirming or negating their content. The privileging of thought over action is a change from the stoic sources that Foucault describes, though he does see continuity in the practices of self-examination.

Foucault cites this discipline as a prime example of a developing technology of the self determinative for Christianity. Hanby disagrees, finding the Cassianite practice of self-examination as perpetuating stoic ideas antithetical to Augustinian orthodoxy: "In Cassian, the formal problem of stoic assent to the intrusion of *phantasiai* returns in Christian guise as the *discretio spirituum*."<sup>35</sup> Hanby argues that Cassian stresses the act of negation, or at least refraining from affirmation, due to Stoic influence:

31. Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 127.

32. Foucault, "About the Beginnings," pp. 175–77.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–77.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

35. Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, p. 122.

“Insofar as these deceptions originate in the soul, and all vice, all attachment to these phantasms does originate there, then their negation amounts to a self-negation. . . . In short, it is linked to a ‘self-naughting,’ a dialectical process which negates the self, and arguably the world, in order that the genuine self may be recovered, ultimately, *as God*.”<sup>36</sup>

The tracing of Stoic influences through Cassian and the monastic tradition is not meant to vilify either. Indeed, while these understandings remained entwined with monastic teaching and discipline, their implications remained unrealized: “It was only as the formal account of will and subjectivity embodied in these practices was freed from this setting and directed toward a different set of ends that the soul which masters itself through its own negation would attain mastery over God and the world through *their* negation.”<sup>37</sup> This freeing from monastic practices is precisely what happens with Descartes.

It is rather ironic that Foucault makes this connection himself while drawing attention to the continuity in the discipline of Seneca and monastic spirituality.<sup>38</sup> While he rightly points to key differences between the two, he fails to see that key aspects of stoicism remain active in the teachings of the monastic writers he sites, and that these aspects are at odds with orthodox doctrines of Christology, the will, and desire. It is these same stoic understandings that influence Descartes, showing that the historical trajectory runs from stoicism, through Cassian and the monastics, to modernity. In light of this oversight, we can now turn to Augustine for an understanding of the self that escapes these stoic influences and offers an orthodox understanding of the self, one defined by a Christian governmentality.

Augustine’s notion of the self is fundamentally at odds with the Cartesian understanding, a point made by Descartes himself.<sup>39</sup> For Augustine, the self is incomprehensible apart from a Christology affirming the role of Christ as *exemplum* and *sacramentum*. In short, Christ is both the end and the means: “To the extent that our knowledge, memory, and love of ourselves turn out to have been true, we recognize that this self-giving love has been there all along, going before us. . . . This insight penetrates

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., p. 133.

38. Foucault, “The Hermeneutics of the Self,” pp. 174–75.

39. Descartes, *To Colvius*, November 14, 1640, quoted in Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, p. 166.

to the depths of what it means for Augustine to exist in time, to remember, to know and to will.”<sup>40</sup> There is a distance involved in that the self longs for Christ, implying difference, yet Christ is also that which fills that distance.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of the function of the will for Augustine, in contrast to Descartes, is crucial. For Descartes, the “will’s act is neither elicited by beauty nor determined by its relation to proper object, the good. Instead Descartes will define it . . . as either the undetermined power of choice, the power to effect causation, or both.”<sup>42</sup> Augustine refuses any notion of will apart from the determination of God’s love. Issues with his understanding of predestination aside, Augustine sees the will’s movement toward the good, and the ability for the will to be so moved, as part of the plenitude inherent in his Trinitarian ontology. Descartes’ effort to define an autonomous will “is to privilege the indeterminacy of choice over the determination of love, and thus inadvertently to privilege the nothing from which we are made over the plenitude of infinite determination who makes.”<sup>43</sup>

It is not necessary to rehearse the entirety of Hanby’s thorough argument to realize the important distinction between the Stoic, Cassianite, and Cartesian understanding of the self critiqued by Foucault, and the Augustinian self. Equally different is the nature of the self-knowledge of which each self is capable. Self-knowledge, for Descartes, is the basis of his metaphysics. Through his method of skepticism he arrives at this primary certainty for all forms of knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

For Augustine, self-knowledge is only conceivable within a larger ontological context that maintains specific notions of love, memory, and will: “For us, to exist, to know, *is* to desire happiness. For us, to desire happiness is not yet to be fully happy. Still the mind could not seek what it does not in some sense already know, though, paradoxically, the mind could also not know this happiness unless it sought it. Self-certainty is close to being assimilated to the *eros* of faith and hope.”<sup>45</sup> From this, Hanby concludes: “As self-knowledge comes to be assimilated to the *eros*

40. Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, p. 146.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

44. J. A. Maurant, “The *Cogitos*: Augustinian and Cartesian,” *Augustine Studies* 10 (1979): 27–42.

45. Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, p. 169.

of faith, so too does the *sapientia* in which we know ourselves come to be identified with a word remembered in time.<sup>46</sup> In short, self-knowledge, like all life, is doxological. Self-knowledge is knowledge of the self as loving and loved. In the earlier discussion of the relationship of confessional practices to truth, we noted that Asad saw the confessant recognizing the truth about him or herself in the act of confessing, while Foucault argues that the truth about the confessant is produced in confession. Within the Augustinian understanding, both are wrong. In confession the confessant learns the truth about God in which he or she can locate the truth about the self.

Augustine is calling for a self understood aesthetically, not unlike Foucault. *The City of God* is, in the end, the description of two governmentalities directed by two notions of the beautiful. It is to the governmentality of Augustine's city, his city of God, that we now turn.

### ***Outlining Christian Governmentality***

Governmentality is an issue of the relationship between subjects and the powers that they are receptive to and constituted by. Within the Augustinian notion of the subject, this relationship requires self-knowledge, but one that lacks the independent, skeptical nature of the Cartesian self-inquiry. For Augustine, nothing "can be said of the mind's relation to itself without the mediation of the revelation of God as its creator and lover."<sup>47</sup> The self is only known through knowledge of God's love, given by God. There can be no knowledge apart from love. Foucault's understanding of power/knowledge is challenged by an understanding of love/knowledge. The love of God takes place in an economy of gift, questioning the usefulness of power as the category that defines relationships.

Confession is undeniably a crucial activity in Christianity. Foucault rightly depicts Christianity as a confessional religion in two senses. First, Christians are required to affirm the truth about certain propositions and writings. Second, there is an obligation for a Christian to "know who he is, what is happening in him. He has to know the faults he may have committed: he has to know the temptations to which he is exposed. And, moreover, everyone in Christianity is obliged to say these things to other

46. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

47. Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity," in *Collectanea Augustiniana, Melanges T. J. Van Bavel*, ed. B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houten (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1993), p. 323.

people, to tell these things to other people, and hence, to bear witness against himself.”<sup>48</sup> Foucault finds this technology of the self problematic, but is it not a microcosmic enacting of his own project? In his analyses of psychiatry, madness, prisons, and the subject, is he not examining institutions, prompting them and the societies in which they exist to learn the truth of what they are (or the truth they produce), what is happening in them, what faults they are responsible for, and the temptation of domination that lurks within all institutions?

The practice of confession is not so different from Foucault’s program, and to some extent this program should guide confessing communities in realizing the depths to which structures of domination and normalization can develop in the guise of humanitarian efforts, education, and truth. He reminds the Christian confessional community of the narrowness of the way between the cultivation of the virtuous life and oppressive structures, impelling the self-examination of the body, both individual and political. The church may be a structure of power, but it is a power embodied not in prisons or hospitals, but in crucifixion. Foucault’s critique illuminates the complicity of certain monastic teachings in the development of the modern subject and, less overtly, the role that the church in contemporary society continues to play in normalizing populations. This critique throws into even starker light the importance of recovering the Augustinian self and corresponding governmentality, thereby calling for the confession of the church.

This confession will always occur on the way to Eucharist. Foucault fails to adequately situate confession within the network of disciplines that constitute the Christian subject: the rest of the sacraments, liturgy, and prayer. Asad hints at this point through the work of Benedict, who writes that a “notable feature of *The Rule* is that the proper performance of the liturgy is regarded as something more than the major end of monastic activity: it is also listed as one of the ‘instruments’ of the monk’s ‘spiritual craft’ and is thus integral to the idea of discipline.”<sup>49</sup> In abstracting confessional practices from this context, Foucault mirrors the act of normalization that he critiques. He reduces relationships to equations of power without allowing space for alternatives to emerge.

To say that confession occurs on the way to the Eucharist means that it, like all Christian discipline, is liturgical in nature. Confession does not

48. Foucault, “About the Beginnings,” p. 170.

49. Asad, “On Ritual and Discipline,” p. 169.

just occur in the confessional, but during the mass in preparation for the Eucharistic celebration. The community comes to know God through the confession in order to be made like God in the sacrament of communion. The truth of the community is received in the confession of the truth about God, hence the truth about the self, in preparation of receiving God in the act that constitutes it(self). This reception is constitutive of an economy not of domination but of gift. The reception of this gift prompts the forming of new governmentalities. As John Milbank writes, concerning the gift, “faith remains possible, as *another* logos, another knowledge and desire, which we should not hesitate to describe as ‘another philosophy’.”<sup>50</sup>

Foucault only partly understands confession. What he fails to understand is that the confessing body, never an isolated individual in the modern sense, turns inward as a movement in the desiring of God. This movement carries the body, personal or communal, beyond itself to behold the Divine beauty. Within the aesthetic ontology of Augustine, the vision of this beauty is also a vision of the beauty that the self is intended toward. Thus, the body is always confessing as a movement of realizing the beauty of God manifested in the self. Within this Eucharistic governmentality, we must ask if the relationship between discipline and knowledge should be characterized by power or by love.

### **Conclusion**

The challenge Foucault presents might be termed “politicalization.” As he explains, “the problem is not so much that of defining a political ‘position’ (which is to choose from a pre-existing set of possibilities) but to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicisation.”<sup>51</sup> That has been the task of this article: developing a new schema, not by imitating the ideas of Augustine, but by their repetition in conjunction with Foucault. His analysis of confession, if in the end incomplete, is helpful in understanding the development of relations of power in much of Western society. Though he intended to uncover a problematizing genealogy of the self, he instead uncovered the genealogy of a parody that cloaked stoic influences in the guise of Augustinianism, the implications of which were only

50. John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” in L. Gregory Jones and Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *Rethinking Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 152.

51. Michel Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 190.

realized when removed from the monastic context and “freed” of theological constraints by Descartes. As descendants of this self and its disciplines now characteristic of the governmentality of states, markets, and other structures of domination, the development of rival genealogies, and rival governmentalities, becomes all the more important.

Foucault opens, or reopens, many avenues to such a development, some of which have been discussed here. He also brought to the fore the issue of bodies in relation to discipline and truth, an important point already being taken up by theologians.<sup>52</sup> Foucault’s points here are also important for a political theology that seeks to deny the confinement of religion to the cultivation of spirituality. “The body is the locus of Christian discipline; the church cannot be relegated to a spiritual realm.”<sup>53</sup>

In the end, Foucault is less concerned with intentions and wills than with the forms of knowledge demanded for the exercising of power and the often unintentional consequences that emerge out of this relationship between power and knowledge.<sup>54</sup> Christianity, in Foucault’s diagnosis, was complicit in the development of forms of discipline now exercised by other structures of power. Moving beyond Foucault’s critique, we may now argue that within the governmentality that results, Christianity all too often becomes another node in the networks of these powers or remains silent in the face of dominations that increasingly rely upon coercion. This diagnosis need not be the last word. Through the repetition of Christian notions of the self found in Augustine, and others throughout the Christian tradition, a rival notion of governmentality may be constructed. In doing so, Christianity affirms a notion of the self and its corresponding disciplines that refuses coercive domination and rejects the disciplines of structures that cannot conceive of discipline in any other way.

52. For example, Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

53. William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 237.

54. Colin Gordon, “Afterword,” in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 248.



# *Political Theology and Pauline Law: Notes Toward a Sapiential Legality*

Aaron Riches

In 1979, on the thirty-ninth anniversary of the closing of the Franco-Spanish border at Port Bou and one day before the anniversary of the suicide of Walter Benjamin, Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt opened the Bible in the Sauerland. The two men sat down in Plettenburg to read St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapters 9–11. As if in memory of Benjamin, they spoke "under a priestly seal": Schmitt, the most important state law theorist of the twentieth century, a Roman Catholic and sometime member of the Nazi Party; Taubes, a Jewish philosopher of a Messianic and oddly left-wing disposition. In a familiar "zone of anomie," the two men resurrected a debate on the rule of Law, the anarchic plenitude of "pure violence," and the political theology of the "state of exception"—a debate first textually manifested in 1923 when Benjamin cited Schmitt's *Political Theology* in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.<sup>1</sup>

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 265; Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). According to Giorgio Agamben, Schmitt's theory of the "state of exception"—as articulated in *Political Theology* (1922)—was formulated as a response to Benjamin's 1921 essay "Critique of Violence" (trans. Edmund Jephcott, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996], pp. 236–52). In "Critique of Violence," Benjamin articulated his notion of "pure violence," of an anomic/divine "action" or "force" outside the dialectic of the Law. Benjamin posited this "pure violence" as the "extreme political object" that paradoxically both threatens and establishes the "rule of Law." Agamben suggests that the Schmitt-Benjamin debate began here, and thus he reads it as *initiated* by Schmitt in the form of a response to Benjamin (and not the other way around, as it has usually been supposed). In this way, Agamben charges the logic of the plenitude/anarchy of "pure violence" with a kind of ontological priority over the restrictive authoritarian

And so it was in the Sauerland, in September 1979, that Taubes unfolded to Schmitt a strange Jewish reading of Paul through Sabbatianism and the liturgy of Yom Kippur. When he was finished Schmitt looked up at him and said: “Taubes, before you die, you must tell some people about this.”<sup>2</sup>

It took almost a decade for Taubes to act on Schmitt’s injunction, and it happened only weeks before his own death. In February 1987, so full of cancer that he could not stand up, Taubes broke the silence of his “priestly seal” to deliver his last lectures at Heidelberg University on the Epistle to the Romans, entitled, “Theory of Religion and Political Theology.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Taubes, Paul’s Epistle “carries a political charge” that is “explosive to the highest degree.”<sup>4</sup> It is a polemical justification of “pneumatic rule,” a Messianic rule that suspends both *Imperium Romanum* and Torah through the establishment of a new subterranean society. Announcing the advent of a “third” politic—beyond Rome’s sovereign rule and Israel’s Law of religious ethnicity—Paul is said to declare the transvaluation of sovereignty: “It isn’t *nomos* but rather the one who was nailed to the cross by *nomos* who is imperator!”<sup>5</sup> In this way Taubes offers a reading

legality of sovereign rule, thereby reading Schmittian logic as a reactive attempt to dialectically include the anomic truth of “pure violence.” Thus, the debate between Schmitt and Benjamin takes place in a “zone of anomie,” which continued after Benjamin’s death with Taubes in Benjamin’s stead. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 52–64.

2. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2004), p. 3.

3. The translation of these lectures makes up the bulk of *The Political Theology of Paul*.

4. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, p. 24. For more on the universal political implications of Paul (now from the point of view of the rootedness of his theology in Hellenistic political theory), see Bruno Blumenfeld, *The Political Paul: Justice, Democracy and Kingship in a Hellenistic Framework* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

5. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, pp. 23–28; here, p. 24. For Taubes, *nomos* in Paul encompasses both the specificity of Torah and the universal function of the political rule of Law. Only in terms of this understanding can the declaration concerning “the one who was nailed to the cross by *nomos*” effectively suspend both *Imperium Romanum* and Torah. Taubes thus proposes an *expansive* understanding of Pauline *nomos* (one I would want to distinguish from the tendency to read Paul’s discussion of *nomos* in terms merely of a generalizable “moral law”). Taubes’s position would be considered contentious among certain Pauline scholars, not least N. T. Wright (to name just one example), for whom Paul’s use of the word “*nomos*” always and specifically signifies “Torah” in a restrictive and concrete sense. Cf. N. T. Wright, “The Law in Romans 2,” in James D. G. Dunn, ed.,

of Paul that outwits the logic of legality *tout court*. Paul transfigures a people into a new community through the “deactivation” of the Law by establishing the rule of *pneuma*, where the Law is no longer practiced but “studied” in a Benjaminian sense.<sup>6</sup> The Pauline Epistle hereby bears witness to a revolutionary specter: a specter against which all the powers of the Old Mediterranean—Roman, Greek, and Jewish—are said to have entered into holy alliance to exorcise.<sup>7</sup>

In the eighth thesis of “On the Concept of History,” Benjamin famously recapitulated the Schmittian sovereign “who decides on the state of exception.”<sup>8</sup> He declared: “[T]he real ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is

*Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), pp. 131–50.

6. “The law which is studied and no longer practiced is the gate of justice” (Walter Benjamin, “Franz Kafka,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1938–1940, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999], pp. 794–818; here, p. 815). Another way of understanding the Benjaminian “deactivation” of the Law, is as the evacuation of the “theological” content of the Law to the merely “philological,” or what Gershom Scholem would call “validity without significance.” Cf. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), p. 460.

7. For Taubes, it is specifically Romans 8 that functions as Paul’s text of Messianic proclamation, and for him it is linked, in the spirit of the politics it justifies, to Benjamin’s “Theological-Political Fragment” (trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–1938, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002], pp. 305–306). On Taubes’s view, both Romans 8 and “Theological-Political Fragment” posit the futility of creation as a kind of negative political ground upon which Messianic/*pneumatic* redemption occurs, i.e., the “restitution in integrum” (Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, p. 70). The Taubesian link between Paul and Benjamin is further substantiated by the recent work of Agamben, who has argued that the little dwarf controlling the puppet called “historical materialism” was always St. Paul. This suggests that something of Paul’s theology of the Law may have always underpinned the Benjamin-Schmitt debate. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005), pp. 138–45.

8. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 5. The decisionism/voluntarism of Schmitt’s theory of the rule of Law is rooted in his attempt to articulate a “human” notion of Law, as opposed to its “bureaucratic” degeneration under liberalism. In order to articulate this “human” aspect, Schmitt locates the Law wholly in the *will* of the sovereign, in the act of “pure decision.” Schmitt is crucially reliant on chapter 26 of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, where Hobbes states that sovereign power/decision *makes* Law and therefore Law is not a matter of *truth* or *reason*. It is perhaps ironic that Schmitt, who was attempting to do battle against “modern” ideas of Law and sovereignty, would root his own notion of sovereignty so deeply in Hobbes, who, as John Milbank has shown, was himself a quintessentially *modern* political thinker. As Milbank notes, Hobbes represents a key modernizing

not the exception but the rule.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Benjamin transfigured Schmittian “decision” into the revolutionary “task” that should seek to bring about the “real state of exception.” Taubes extends this political theology, supplementing the eighth thesis with Gershom Scholem’s Sabbatianism (reading Paul as a Nathan of Gaza).<sup>10</sup> The real state of exception is realized in the new community that recognizes sovereignty in the one anathematized by the Law (whether Sabbatai Zevi or Jesus of Nazareth). The force of Law is “deactivated” through the abjection of God’s sovereign, who is the concrete revelation that the exception is in fact the rule.

For Taubes, the command of Torah to love God and neighbor (cf. Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) is crucially reformulated by Paul into an injunction to love the “enemy” (cf. Rom. 11:28).<sup>11</sup> Only loving the “enemy” enacts the politics of Love beyond the rule of Law. It is thus that Taubes arrives at the sentence of deliberation between him and Schmitt: *as regards the Gospel, the Jews are enemies* (Rom. 11:28). By his own logic, Schmitt could only read the text in one way: “the political” is founded by the rule of exception

moment in political thought toward a notion of sovereignty imbued with the superstition of Enlightenment logic: collapsing sovereignty into “technical control” in imitation of Enlightenment science’s collapse of “truth” into the same. Just as “truth” is reified into “pure empirical grasp,” so sovereignty is reified into “pure power/decision.” Both cases bear witness to a dissociation of sensibility, a loss of the pre-modern sense of *wisdom’s mediation* of both the Law and sovereignty. For Schmitt’s use of chapter 26 of *Leviathan*, see Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 32ff. On Hobbes, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 10–23. This critique of Schmitt’s reliance on Hobbes was originally noted (in a slightly different way) by Leo Strauss, who, in his commentary on Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*, described Schmitt’s reliance on Hobbes as betraying the fact that he was yet “under the spell” of the liberalism he was apparently criticizing. See Leo Strauss, “Notes on Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*,” trans. J. Harvey Lomax, in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 81–108.

9. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), pp. 389–400; thesis VIII at p. 392.

10. For Scholem’s Sabbatianism, see Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, trans. Michael A. Meyer and Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); and Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mythical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973). On the relation of the political theologies of Scholem and Benjamin, see Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

11. Cf. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, pp. 51–54 and 129–31.

and so on the sovereign decision of expulsion.<sup>12</sup> Schmitt does not “study” the text; rather, he adopts a folk tradition of anathematization and so sanctions the letter of exception in order to enforce the rule of Law that secures his vision of “the political.” When he gets to Romans 11:28, he stops in the middle of the verse, affirming the “racist theozoology” of the Führer.<sup>13</sup>

“As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election, they are beloved” (Rom. 11:28). Taubes writes: “The word ‘enemy’ also appears there, in the absolute sense but . . . connected with ‘loved’.”<sup>14</sup> Taubes refuses the logic that founds “the political” through a

12. For Schmitt, “the political” signifies the sphere of human communal government lost under the rule of the modern-liberal State. It designates the human “we” as distinguished from the abstract anonymity of bureaucratic capitalism. More specifically, “the political” designates what Schmitt perceives as the authentic function of the Law as opposed to liberalism’s mechanized and disenchanting function of the Law. What Schmitt wants is *situational* Law, a Law personally embodied in sovereign decision and so un-abstracted from time and place. There is no room in the Schmittian scheme for a Kantian categorical imperative or a Kelsenian “universally valid law.” Thus, for Schmitt, “the political” is an artifice of will designating the “we” of the political community (beyond “bare life”) in the situational decision of the sovereign himself. Hence, “the political” is grounded in a distinction between, on the one hand, “friends”/“us” (with all the sovereign “rights” of the surplus of the artificial nature of “the political”) and, on the other hand, “enemies”/“them” (who exist as “bare life” and are thus rightless because they are outside the surplus of the artificial nature of “the political”). Concretely it is *this* conception of “the political” that is recapitulated by Taubes’s reading of Romans. (Nevertheless it should be noted that Taubes remains crucially *illiberal* and as resolved as Schmitt against the modern-liberalism of the bureaucratized State.) On “the political,” see Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. On overcoming the abstract mechanism of bureaucratized liberalism, see Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 13ff. The blending here of Foucault’s notion of “biopolitics” with Schmittian exception follows the work of Giorgio Agamben, who first made this connection. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998), and Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la Biopolitique* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

13. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, p. 51. Pointing to Schmitt’s August 1, 1934, newspaper article in support of Hitler, “Der Führer schützt das Recht,” Tracy B. Strong argues that it was Hitler’s “manifestation of sovereignty in the use of power that attracted Schmitt: *his understanding of law required that he support Hitler*” (emphasis is Strong’s). In this way Strong situates Schmitt’s adherence to National Socialism wholly within his logic of sovereignty: enemies of the regime are enemies of the German “we.” See Strong, “Foreword” to Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. ii–xxxiii; here, p. xxxi. Cf. Strong, “Foreword: Dimensions of the New Debate on Carl Schmitt,” in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, pp. ix–xxviii. Cf. Raphael Gross, *Carl Schmitt and the Jews: The “Jewish Question,” the Holocaust, and German Legal Theory*, trans. Joel Golb (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

14. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, pp. 112–13.

sovereign decision of expulsion, the abjection of an “enemy,” a scapegoat or *homo sacer*.<sup>15</sup> Conceiving the new society of *pneuma* in terms of the expulsion of an “enemy,” for Taubes, is a grave misreading of Paul. One must “study” Romans 11 as far as the unequalizable mercy of God (cf. Rom. 11:31). God’s mercy is for the enemy, his beloved Israel (cf. Rom. 11:28). In this way, Taubes’s Benjaminian reading of Romans further exposes Schmitt’s inability to secure sovereignty beyond the Messianic state of exception. Nevertheless, if Taubes further exposes the limit of Schmittian sovereignty, I propose there is yet a more satisfactory mobilization of Paul at the service of deactivating the rule of Schmittian exception. My contention is that the political theology of the Benjaminian-Taubesian anomic *polis* does not fully overdetermine the old dialectic of Schmittian exception—especially insofar as the “rule of Law,” on the Benjaminian-Taubesian view, is situated itself as a term excluded from the political labor of the new subterranean society. Here, to my mind, Taubes is not Pauline enough: the “deactivated” Law does not yet establish the full newness of Pauline Law and does not outwit the voluntaristic logic of Schmittian sovereignty.<sup>16</sup>

At the heart of Romans, bound to Paul’s proclamation of the new people, is the conviction that in the ecclesia (the Messianic *polis*) the Law has been finally realized: “Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (Rom. 3:31)—we “*histenomen*” the Law, we “cause it to stand upright,” we “confirm it.” The

15. I am correlating the logic of Taubes and Agamben with the *méconnaissance* of the Girardian “scapegoat mechanism”—that psychological concealment or suppression of the truth of the innocence of the victim which is the necessary condition of the possibility that victimization might work as *pharmakos*, that victimization might secure/establish the “peace” of the community. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), pp. 309–18; and Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986).

16. See John Milbank, “Paul Against Biopolitics,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 47, nos. 1–2 (2006): 9–52. My reading of the politics of Pauline Law is informed throughout by Milbank, who shows how Paul’s theology overcomes the “biopolitical paradoxes” that govern the logic of the liberal nation-state. For Paul, as Milbank shows, the horizon of the *polis* of the ecclesia is governed, not only by the antique justice of “natural law” in relation to “life,” but this fused into the “pneumatic spark” of undying goodness rooted in the Resurrection, a horizon of justice and forgiveness beyond every reduction of “the political” to the realm of “bare life.” For more on the category of “life” in theology, see Conor Cunningham, “The End of Death?” in James McGuirk, ed., *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society* (Maynooth: National University of Ireland, 2005), pp. 19–42.



Law is established because the new community is founded in the Messianic fulfillment (*pleroma*).<sup>17</sup> Jesus Christ, through his crucifixion and Resurrection, fulfills the Law in establishing the *polis* of pneumatic Love. For Paul, Christ is the *telos* of the Law because he is the fulfillment of the *arche* of creation: the One in whom all things hold together (cf. Col. 1:17; Rom. 10:4). Law and creation are correlative. This means that Romans 1:20—where Paul argues that *the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen by the things that are made*—is integrally linked to Romans 2:15, where Paul claims that there is a Law *written on the human heart to which conscience naturally bears witness*.

Recognizing the link between Romans 1:20 and 2:15 means that Pauline Law is irreducible to the equivocity of the Law's threatened suspension. Whether the voluntarism of the "pure decision" of Schmittian "sovereignty" or the antinomian "pure violence" of Benjaminian "real exception," the rule of Law in both cases is conceived in terms divested from the integral relation that Paul posits between the Law and the *logos*

17. I should perhaps clarify my view in contradistinction to Hegel's exposition of Christ-as-*pleroma* in *Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* (in G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975], pp. 182–301). For Hegel, Christ-as-*pleroma* both fulfills and annihilates Torah. What I am positing—in what will become my emphasis on the *sapiential* aspect of Law—suggests something rather different. I want to emphasise a sapiential fulfillment of Torah as *universal Law*, such that neither the particularity of Torah nor the Jewish people need to be replaced, but (in accord with Romans 11) can be thought of as transfigured into a witness to the eschatological promise of the outpouring of Sapiencia consummated in the ecclesial ingathering of all things at the end of time. My argument could thus be read as closer to that of Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* (trans. Barbara E. Galli [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2005]). Michael Mack has described Rosenzweig's critique of Hegel primarily in terms of his rejection of Hegel's pseudotheology of nationalism—at the heart of which, of course, lies the issue of the Law. Mack shows how Rosenzweig counters Hegel with a notion of Jewish Law in which Law and creation are correlative. As Mack writes: "The law [for Rosenzweig] mediates between God and the world and thereby prohibits any violation of life." This is counter to what Mack describes as Hegel's "metaphysics of eating," according to which the Law is not intrinsically related to life; but rather, functions always as a prohibition—an obstruction—to the authentic life of human "autonomy." For this clarification I am indebted to conversations with Bruce Rosenstock and Michael Mack. On Hegel's notion of *pleroma*, see Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel*, trans. Nicholas Walker and Simon Jarvis (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998). On Rosenzweig and Hegel, see Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 125–35; here, p. 134.



of being. For Paul, Law is an ontological category, an analogical term grounded in the good gift of creation's perfected exceeding.<sup>18</sup> The Law is precisely that which cannot be "deactivated" or reduced to "decision."<sup>19</sup> The Pauline task, therefore, is to establish the Law according to its unpredictable fullness: beyond the dialectic of exclusion and thus toward the delight of the Law's excessive perfection in the Messianic *polis*. This establishes the rule of Law as "doxological desire" in the sense of Psalm 119, where the Law itself delightfully fulfills every human longing

18. In this regard Thomas Aquinas is faithfully Pauline when he makes "Law" a transcendental predicate, a perfection of "Being" alongside "Beauty," "Goodness," and "Truth" (cf. *Summa theologiae*, II–I, qq. 90–93). Further on the Law in Aquinas, see Fergus Kerr, O.P., *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 97–113; Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfilment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2002), pp. 15–30; and especially Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 193–206.

19. Here I would want to caution against conflating the "voluntarism" of Schmittian "exception" with the "antinomianism" of Benjaminian "real exception." For Schmitt, "exception" involves an *idealism* wherein "decision" is actually a positive *reinvigoration* of "the political"; while for Benjamin, the role of "decision" (indeed the possibility of "decision") is complexified by the fact that "exception" is *already* the "rule." Benjamin's "rule" of exception can thus be read as the historical fact articulated in his ninth thesis in "On the Concept of History" (p. 392). There, the "angel of history" faces the "single catastrophe" of the past according to which history is despair: a "wreckage" that is already the "deactivated" Law of "exception" and "pure violence." On this reading, the Benjaminian "rule" is the storm that blows from Paradise and drives the angel into the future, to which the angel's back is crucially turned—he is transfixed by "the pile of debris" that is the past: "What we call progress is *this* storm." Paradise and eschaton are thus collapsed into a single "rule," what only the naïve bourgeois mind could call "progress." On this scheme pessimism is the ground of antinomianism in such a way that the possibility of "decision" is overdetermined by the violence of the storm of the "same" (because the exception is the rule). And this seems, at least in part, to be what Michael Mack is getting at when he writes of the "despairing gesture" (p. 156) of Benjamin's thought, in which "hope precisely resides in the hopelessness" (p. 155). Here, Schmittian "exception" is "deactivated" by an antinomian pessimism that destroys voluntarism by destroying the condition of the possibility of every "reinvigoration." For Taubes, however, there seems to be something of a retreat from Benjamin's "despairing gesture"; and in this way Taubes tends to return to Schmitt's voluntarism, taking up the "task" of bringing about the "real state of exception" (in the form of the decisionistic establishment of the subterranean society). If this reading is correct, then Taubes's antinomianism is more voluntaristic than Benjamin's because it is less pessimistic, which means that Taubes, in a certain sense, is more Schmittian than Benjaminian. In these comments I am again indebted to conversations with Michael Mack. On Benjamin's pessimism, cf. Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, pp. 155–67.

(cf. Ps. 119:174). Here, the Law becomes a term not of prohibition, but of Love, overflowing the dialectic of violence and exception that posits Law and Love in opposition.

To read Pauline Law in this direction is to travel past Romans 11:28, beyond both Schmitt's pause at "enemies for your sake" and Taubes's grasp upon the word "beloved"—it is to follow Romans 11 into the sapiential fulfillment of the Law at verse 33, where Paul names the Messianic outpouring of Sapiientia: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable is his Justice!" (Rom. 11:33).

In this text, Paul blends the apophatic Justice of the Holy One of Israel with the speculative tradition of thinking the Law in terms of Sapiientia (Sophia), a tradition with roots not only in Hebrew religion, but also in Greek philosophy.<sup>20</sup> According to this scheme, the Law is the "work of divine Wisdom" herself.<sup>21</sup> This coheres with the correlative interrelation of Romans 1:20 and 2:15. Only in the authenticity of this sapiential aspect can the Law be fulfilled in the Messiah, who, because he is Wisdom, is himself the "end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). Here the integral relation between Law and reason—*Law-as-Wisdom*—is affirmed.

Unlocking the logic of the Law written on the human heart leads to the conclusion that, for Paul, there is an élan of being that already contains something of the sapiential delight of the Law's doxological fulfillment. Humanity does not merely invent the Law on the basis of calculation or expediency—nor, for that matter, does Torah drop fideistically out of the sky. Rather, humanity *discovers* the Law already present in things: in the soil of creation, in the depth of the human heart, and, ultimately, in the eschatological fulfillment of the Messianic Resurrection. This notion of Law presupposes a concept of nature ordered to the Good in such a way

20. Cf. Plato, *The Laws*, 3.690b–c. In proposing a sapiential (or sophianic) conception of Law, I am consciously following the speculative tradition of the Russian Orthodox "sophologists," Vladimir Slovyov, Sergei Bulgakov, and Pavel Florensky. However, I am also gesturing toward filling a lacuna, as none of the sophiologists (at least not to the best of my knowledge) did significant work on the sapiential/sophianic aspect of Law. On sophiology, cf. John Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy: the New Theological Horizon," in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, eds., *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring The World Through The Word* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 45–85.

21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1950; and cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–I, q. 91, a. 2, where Aquinas states explicitly that Law pertains to "reason" not "will."

that “nature and reason interlock” in their tending toward the perfection of the goodness of being.<sup>22</sup> If the Law is rooted in being, then no political thought or action can be reduced to mere voluntarism. Politics occurs within the realm of *synderesis*: establishing or transgressing the Law written on the heart.<sup>23</sup> What is more, if the order of nature in which the Law is written is fulfilled in the Resurrection of a crucified man, then a new intensity of being and life has to be affirmed: the rule of Law can no longer function in terms of a biopolitical framework in which life is negatively defined by death.<sup>24</sup>

The sapiential nature of Pauline Law is rooted in the Wisdom literature of the Catholic Old Testament (books “apocryphal” to the canons of both the Protestant and Hebrew Bibles).<sup>25</sup> There Sapientia herself is named “the Law that will endure forever” (Baruch 4:1). In the Wisdom literature, the Law functions as a unequalizable term, a plurivocal term beyond the legal dialectic; and this most strikingly in the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach. Ben Sira writes that the Law of Moses “overflows like Pishon with wisdom, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits” (24:24–25). And just a few verses before, Sapientia herself hymns to creation:

22. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroads, 2006), pp. 37–40; here at p. 37. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), pp. 28–29.

23. The term *synderesis* (a Latin deformation of the Greek word *synteresis*) comes from St. Jerome, who translated it “spark of conscience.” Thomas Aquinas writes: “For there to be rectitude in human actions, it is necessary that there be in them a permanent principle, of an unmovable rectitude, in the light of which all a man’s acts may be examined, [and that would be] of such a kind that this permanent principle resists everything evil and grants its assent to everything good. Such is synderesis, whose function is to reproach evil and incline toward the good; we must also allow that synderesis cannot sin” (*De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 1). Ratzinger has suggested that the more clearly defined Platonic concept of *anamnesis* can (perhaps with more precession) do the work of the Latin medieval notion of *synderesis*—and he makes this suggestion specifically in reference to Romans 2:14–15 (see Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, pp. 90ff). On *synderesis* in Aquinas, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 2003), pp. 315f (the quotation from *De Veritate* is as quoted in Torrell).

24. See Milbank, “Paul Against Biopolitics.”

25. The Pauline debt to the Wisdom literature is signaled not least in the fact that Romans 1:20 is an important paraphrase from the Wisdom of Solomon 13:1–9. On the Law in the Wisdom literature, cf. Levering, *Biblical Natural Law*, pp. 63–65.

Come to me, you who desire me and eat your fill of my fruits. For the memory of me is sweeter than honey and the possession of me is sweeter than honeycomb. (24:19–20; cf. Matt. 11:28–30)

In the sensual delight associated with Sapiientia—who is herself the universal Law—one can detect something of an integral overabundance that points to what it might mean for the Law to be fulfilled “all in all” (cf. Eph. 1:23; 1 Cor. 15:28). Here we begin to grasp the new resurrectional logic of the Law beyond the horizon of death, beyond every debt (every exception) save the gratuitous debt of Love (Rom. 13:8, 10).

In this way, a Pauline theology of Law opens into a theology of Sapiientia, overdetermining the sovereign rule of exception by embodying something of the plenitude that lies beyond a merely prescriptive rule of Law defined by a negative horizon. This aspect of the Law fulfills and embodies the just transgression of whatever quasi-sovereign power would contradict the *synderesis* of the sapiential flourishing of the human person.<sup>26</sup> Here we can speak of sapiential transgressions of authoritarian rules of pure decisionism that restrictively function in the realm that Jacques Lacan identifies with the Law’s “paternal function.” However, beyond Lacan, the Wisdom tradition is suggestive of something like a “sapiential *jouissance*” within the Law itself, a *jouissance* that Lacan forecloses in his conception of the Law in wholly “phallic” terms.

According to Lacan the injunction of the Law is an impossible command: “The dialectical relationship between desire and the Law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the Law, through which it becomes the desire for death.”<sup>27</sup> For Lacan, the Law functions in terms of the paternal metaphor, the realm of the symbolic, which involves the substitution of the *objet petit a* for the *jouissance* of the Other. Lacanian Law thus works through an operation of exclusion, through the exception of the Real object of desire. Paternal sovereignty is a particular rule of “Enjoy!—Don’t Enjoy!” The Law orders the subject according to this logic: “Jouis!” to which the subject responds “J’ouïs!”<sup>28</sup> *Jouissance* is unintelligible apart from the dialectical aporia that forecloses *jouissance*. And this is where

26. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 95, a. 2; and Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 1.5.

27. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960: Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), pp. 83–84.

28. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 696.

Lacan invokes Paul: “I would not have known what it is to covet if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Rom. 7:7).<sup>29</sup> Here, the Lacanian notion of Law resounds with Benjaminian and Schmittian exception, but now in a slightly different key. For what is exceptional for Lacan is “male” *jouissance*, which is the desire of lack and the enjoyment of what the paternal function necessarily excludes. The tension in Benjamin and Schmitt between Law and exception is, in Lacan, a tension between Law and desire. In each case the Law names transgression and is sustained by the perpetual exclusion of the Other. This signals the creeping “pessimism” inherent in the ontological forgetfulness that underpins both the voluntarism of conceiving the rule of Law as “pure decision” as well as the antinomian conception of the Law as rooted in “pure violence.”

Lacan is explicit: “it is not the Law itself that bars the subject’s access to *jouissance*—it simply makes a barred subject out of an almost natural barrier.”<sup>30</sup> The Law is all there is of *jouissance*.<sup>31</sup> *Jouissance* only exists as the excluded term of legality because the symbolic, in order to invent, must erase. The locus of speech is the locus of lack: “the being of language is the non-being of objects.”<sup>32</sup> The Law prohibits what cannot in any case be done or accomplished. And so a Lacanian response to the antinomian attempt to “deactivate” the Law would insist that there cannot be “deactivation”: without the Law there is simply nothing.<sup>33</sup> In this light, a

29. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 83–84.

30. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 696.

31. The following remarks on Lacan are guided by Conor Cunningham’s diagnosis of the negative ontology on which the premise of Lacanian logic rests: the fundamental and literal non-existence of *jouissance*. Conor Cunningham, “Lacan, Philosophy’s Difference, and Creation From No-One,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78 (2004): 245–79.

32. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 524. Commenting on this quotation Cunningham writes: “We can easily discern this legacy, one initially inherited from Kojève, in Blanchot when he says: ‘The word gives me what it signifies, but first it suppresses it. . . . [I]t is the absence of being’ . . .” Cunningham, “Lacan, Philosophy’s Difference, and Creation From No-One,” p. 451 (quoting Maurice Blanchot, “La littérature et le droit à la mort,” in *De Kafka à Kafka* [Paris: Gallimard, 1981], pp. 36–37).

33. I take this realization to be already internal to the “despairing gesture” of Benjamin’s antinomianism (cf. note 19 above). But further, one way of parsing the “despairing gesture” of this “pessimism,” is by noticing how it fits Cunningham’s *Gestalt* logic of the “philosophies of Nothing” (cf. Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* [London: Routledge, 2002]). For Cunningham, the *Gestalt* figure of the Duck/Rabbit is the logic of the dual-monism of nihilism (here “pessimism”) according to which “something” is grounded in “nothing” such that nothing

theoretical overcoming of Schmittian exception requires that the plenitude of the real state of exception be theorized *within* the Law—radicalizing the rule of Law in the direction of establishing the unequalizable rule of the Law’s sapiential flourishing.

To argue for a political overdetermination of Schmittian exception along these lines is to make an argument for the Law embodied in Love. It is to argue not for something discretely beyond the Law, but rather for something delightfully beyond the legal dialectic, yet paradoxically grounded in the Law’s sapiential depth. It is an argument rooted in the Pauline conviction that Love fulfills the Law (cf. Gal. 5:6). Here the negative aspect of the Law, the dialectic of the “curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13), gives way to the plurivocity of Love’s transfiguration of the Law’s “yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

The apparent dissociation in Lacan between Law and Love is complexified by the fact that, in order to establish Lacan’s notion of Love’s *jouissance*, one must again return to Paul, for whom the negative aspect of the dialectic of the Law is just that: an *aspect*, a particular function of Law that is not the total content of all that the Law is. This signals the possibility that, through Paul, Lacanian Law can become tensively united to the *jouissance* it apparently excludes. As Slavoj Žižek comments:

Lacan’s extensive discussion of love in *Encore* should... be read in the Pauline sense, as opposed to the dialectic of the Law and its transgression: this second dialectic is clearly “masculine”/phallic; it involves the tension between the All (the universal Law) and its constitutive exception; while love is “feminine,” it involves the paradoxes of the non-All.<sup>34</sup>

On one level this is entirely consonant with Paul: Love is beyond exception and therefore registers in the realm of the Lacanian “feminine.” And

can be thought of *as* something (as Plotinus grounds “being” in “non-being,” Kant grounds the “phenomenal” in the “noumenal” and Lacan the “symbolic” in the “Real”). The dualism of “nothing” and “something” is identified as a mere *Gestalt* effect and therefore betrays a fundamental monism that is unable to think real difference. Benjaminian “pessimism” fits Cunningham’s *Gestalt* scheme insofar as, by declaring that the “exception” *is* the “rule,” Benjamin posits the “exception” (whether of the Law or of antinomian revolution) as ultimately grounded in One “rule,” which is the monadic “stuff” of all that is (i.e., the “storm” of the angel of history). The monism that grounds the dualism of “exception” and the “rule” is the “rule” of the angel of history: the vanishing point out of which nothing escapes.

34. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 147.

yet, for Paul, the fact that Love is beyond the dialect of the Law does not mean that Love is *opposed* to the Law. On the contrary, Pauline Love opposes nothing but fulfills all things (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–8). There cannot be a simple dichotomy or dialectical relation between Law and Love. If Messianic Love is beyond the dialectic of the Law, this is the case for Paul precisely because Love fulfills all desire and so paradoxically fulfills both the Law and the Law’s transgression. This means that, for Paul, the Law is not wholly captured by Lacan’s “masculine”/phallic dialectic; rather, for Paul, the Law exceeds the Lacanian “masculine” by including within itself the gratuity of “feminine”/sapiential *jouissance*. Love in a Pauline sense is not merely the Lacanian-Žižekian paradox of *pas-tout* (non-all); it is the paradox of *pas-tout* (non-all) tensively united to the paradox of *panta en pasin* (all in all).<sup>35</sup>

The Pauline proclamation of the Law of Grace—the establishment of the Law of the Messianic *polis* beyond the decision of exception—exceeds the biopolitical logic of liberalism, of sovereignty conceived in terms of a power of decision over life. This biopolitical logic has been especially evident in the post-9/11 world, where “the political” has been distinguished by a rule of exception in the form of “states of emergency” declared in the name of “State security.”<sup>36</sup> In this context a renewed logic of *homo sacer* came to mark a geopolitical landscape in which Schmittian exception enjoyed an increasingly normative role—whether in the form of Abu Ghraib tactics and Guantánamo Bay standards of negating the “human person,” or in the form of pre-emptive warfare (and the threat thereof) as a tactical spectacle of a global sovereign power of decision that purported to be the sole arbiter of international Law. In this context, figures as diverse as Giorgio Agamben and Pope Benedict XVI warned against the tendency of liberalism to the recourse of securing itself by means that would in fact demolish both democracy and the legal category

35. This is to say something that hopefully correlates with Marcus Pound’s deployment of Thomas Aquinas to explore the formulae of sexuation as the transition from the Old Law to the New. Pound draws out the theology of the new truth revealed in Christ, which is “superabundant”/*excedentem* (*Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 101, a. 2, ad. 2), in order to show how, for Aquinas, after the revelation of Christ, there is *too much truth* and therefore our sense of lack arises from *excedentem* (hence my claim on behalf of the paradoxical union of *pas-tout* with *panta en pasin*). See Marcus Pound, *Žižek: A Very Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 63.

36. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 1–31; and Jean-Claude Paye, *Global War on Liberty*, trans. James H. Membrez (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007).



of the “human person.”<sup>37</sup> For at least a time, liberalism manifested afresh its internal capacity to transform itself into a new variant of quasi-fascism, wholly determined by an apparent sovereign power of decision over life.

The internal continuity between this biopolitical conception of sovereign power and the conception of human rights underpinning contemporary liberal bioethics should be noted, especially if we are to take seriously the organic capacity of late-capitalist liberalism to tend toward a quasi-fascist political voluntarism, a politics capable of reducing human persons to “bare life.” On the one hand, sovereignty is reduced to the total authoritarianism of the power of decision over life; while on the other hand, “the heart of liberty” is conceived as “the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, of the mystery of human life.”<sup>38</sup>

37. Agamben’s remarks are stated in his *State of Exception*. The Pope’s remarks are scattered, but his 2007 message for World Day of Peace clearly points to a conclusion essentially in agreement with Agamben’s. There the Pope speaks of the precarious new situation of international warfare, where wars increasingly are illegal and undeclared (i.e., they are either “terroristic” or “pre-emptive”—warfare in a “zone of anomie”). In this context, he warns of the severe danger posed to all humanity in the disconcerting new commonplace of bypassing “ethical limits restricting the use of modern methods of guaranteeing internal security”—thus warning precisely against the rule of the “state of emergency” in the name of “securing” democracy. All of what the Pope stated in this regard is rooted in the consistent resistance of the Vatican to the illegal American-led war against Iraq, more recently reiterated by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran in August 2007 when he again referred to the American invasion and occupation of Iraq as a “crime against peace” (lamenting the fact that Christians in Iraq were safer under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein). In terms of the Pope’s view, one should also note the 2004 comment of then Cardinal Ratzinger, who, in the context of the phenomenon of terrorism and the war in Iraq, called for a reinvigorated *ius gentium* “without disproportionate hegemonies.” In what can be read as a thinly veiled critique of the American adventure, Ratzinger wrote: “It is impossible to overcome terrorism, illegal violence detached from morality, by force alone. . . . [I]n order that the force employed by law not itself become unjust [and therefore illegal], it must submit to strict criteria that are recognizable by all. It must pay heed to the causes of terrorism, which often has its source in injustices against which no effective action is taken. This is why the system of law must endeavor to use all available means to clear up any situations of injustice. Above all it is important to contribute a measure of *forgiveness*, in all, in order to break the cycle of violence” (*Values in a Time of Upheaval*, pp. 106–7). In specifying *forgiveness* as integral to the rule of justice, Ratzinger’s view correlates with Milbank’s diagnosis of the Pauline *resurrectional* horizon of justice rooted in a logic beyond every reduction of justice to “bare life” (cf. note 16 above).

38. *Casey v. Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania*, 112 Sup. Ct. 2791 at 2807. Cf. Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), pp. 15–16: “Martha Nussbaum, one of the most articulate contemporary defenders of the liberal/modern perspective, says that liberalism is

This continuity underpins the paradox of the new American administration, which promises at once to close Guantánamo Bay (an apparently symbolic end to the “state of emergency” of the previous administration), while asserting unequivocal support for a renewed American commitment to a bioethic that would subject the category of “life” to either the apparently inalienable “human right” of subjective decisionism or the scientific necessity of human “progress.” Here Agamben’s work on *homo sacer* connects with what Robert Spaemann has observed as the new deployment of the term “person” in contemporary ethical and philosophical discourse against the sanctity of human life.

According to Spaemann, the term “person,” since Boethius, served always as a *nomen dignitatis*, a term deployed to signify the sanctity of the human being. In the last century, however, its function was reversed. As Spaemann writes:

Suddenly the term “person” has come to play a key role in *demolishing* the idea that human beings, *qua* human beings, have some kind of rights before other human beings. Only human beings can have human rights, and human beings can have them only as persons. The argument then runs: but not all human beings *are* persons; and those that are, are not persons in every stage of life or in every state of consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

This new role of the term “person” is manifestly not extrinsic to the modern politics of *homo sacer*. In this light it is no coincidence that the Nazi government—ruling as it did as a “state of emergency”—was not only a terrific innovator in deploying the logic of *homo sacer* through the hyper-acceleration of the “camp” into the “death camp,” but also (with America) the world leader in the realm of eugenics. Indeed, the “science”

essentially the valorization of the prerogative of the individual subject, more precisely, an affirmation of that subject’s right to choose, even the meaning of his or her own life. . . . We can see this paradigmatically in Descartes’s affirmation of the epistemological primordiality and meaning-creating capacity of the *cogito*. . . . It comes to perhaps clearest expression in Friedrich Nietzsche’s uncompromising elevation of the prerogative of the will (a perfect mirror of the voluntarist divine will in Occam) and the concomitant need of that heroic will to put the competitive God to death. . . . [T]he modern preference for the freedom of the individual is no more baldly and forcibly defended than in the U.S. Supreme Court’s judgment in the case of *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*.<sup>39</sup>

39. Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference Between “Someone” and “Something”*, trans. Oliver O’Donovan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), passim; here, p. 2 (emphasis is Spaemann’s).

of extermination used in the death camps was originally developed through the Nazi euthanasia program. The power of decision over life correlates the politics of *homo sacer* with a bioethic that would, in a concerted way, throw into question the sanctity of human life. This correlation exposes the cynicism and incoherence of both the “liberal” ideology of outrage over Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, on the one hand, and the “neo-conservative” ideology of “pro-life” rhetoric, on the other. What the “liberal” sows in the realm of bioethics (i.e., the erosion of the right to life in favor of “choice” and scientific “progress”), the “neo-conservative” reaps in the realm of politics (i.e., the illegality of *homo sacer* and the negation of the “human person” in the name of “security” and “democracy”). The threat of quasi-fascism posed by the rule of the “state of emergency” is internal to the “culture of death.”<sup>40</sup>

In light of what has been rehearsed, the question of Pauline Law is relevant to the theoretical critique of the “state of emergency” and the voluntarism of the power of decision over life. And this all the more if the Lacanian answer to the effort to “deactivate” the Law holds true: if antinomianism is impossible because the exceptional *jouissance* the Law prohibits “is” only insofar as the Law makes it so. The Sapientia of Law needs to be re-theorized: we require a speculative ethos of reflection that will learn afresh the rational mediation of ontology and politics, Law and life in order to forge a pattern of virtue that resists the anomic sovereignty of the power of decision over life.<sup>41</sup> The end of such reflection should aim

40. See John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*; cf. Michael Hanby, “The Culture of Death, the Ontology of Boredom, and the Resistance of Joy,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2004): 181–99.

41. Writing of a “pattern of virtue” of resisting the politics of the power of decision over life, I am thinking of something like a MacIntyrian virtue ethic blended with a Milbankian economy of gift (the latter being essentially a work in Pauline ecclesiology). See Alastair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame UP, 1984); and John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” in L. Gregory Jones and Stephen E. Fowl, eds., *Rethinking Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 119–61, and Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003). On the level of political praxis, what I am suggesting might be thought of as an injunction to update the spirit of Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker. Most importantly, this political praxis would need to heed MacIntyre’s injunction for a passage beyond Trotsky’s “pessimism,” the potently nihilistic core of both the “pure violence” of antinomianism and the “pure decision” of the rule of the “state of emergency” (both of which Trotsky practiced and theorized in his notion of “permanent revolution”). For MacIntyre this pessimism is only overcome through the hopeful expectation of a new St. Benedict—a new rule of virtue.

to embody afresh what Paul calls the “letter from Christ,” which is written “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3).<sup>42</sup> Here, in the patterned virtue of Sapiientia, Law and Love are perfectly united in the *synderesis* of Messianic rule. This sapiential mediation of Law into a practice of “virtue” is precisely what the “zone of anomie” cannot yield.<sup>43</sup>

By way of conclusion: I want to reiterate my suggestion that the best way of overcoming the logic of Schmittian exception is through overcoming the negative ontology that underpins both Schmittian sovereignty and the antinomian effort to “deactivate” the Law. I have argued that a theoretically adequate response to Schmittian exception will need to retrieve the sapiential unity of Pauline Law, the analogical mode by which the Law tensively unites the *logos* of being with the *synderesis* of the human heart in the resurrectional unity of Messianic Love. This will involve an understanding of the Law as a term of ontological plurivocity, a term beyond both the antinomian reduction of the Law to an object of mere “study” and the totalitarian reduction of the Law to mere authoritarian “power.” What is left to sublimate is the nominalist ontology that fuels a conception of legality divested from Sapiientia, the soil of creation and the pneumatic spark of Resurrection. Such a notion of Law, floating free from the goodness of the gift of being, forecloses the delightful outpouring of that mercy and Love Paul was so sure Christ brought in bringing himself.<sup>44</sup>

42. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 106, a. 1.

43. For Benjamin, the closest we get to anything like “virtue” is anarchic violence: “Once again all the eternal forms are open to pure divine violence, which myth bastardized with law. Divine violence may manifest itself in a true war exactly as it does in the crowd’s divine judgment on a criminal. But all mythic, lawmaking violence, which may be called ‘executive’, is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving, ‘administrative’ violence that serves it” (Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” p. 252; as quoted in Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, pp. 166–67).

44. I would like to thank Bruce Rosenstock for his helpful response to an earlier version of this article, delivered at the AAR in San Diego, 2008. Thanks also to Russell Berman, Conor Cunningham, Chris Hackett, Michael Mack, and Peter Watts for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

*Outbreak Attempts:  
New Scholarship on Adorno*

Ulrich Plass

Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. Pp. x + 236.

Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, eds., *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 221.

Alastair Morgan, *Adorno's Concept of Life*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Pp. xi + 163.

Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 233.

David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 328.

A return to Adorno, called for by Robert Hullot-Kentor twenty years ago in this journal,<sup>1</sup> has materialized as a welcome scholarly development, and Adorno is now being considered increasingly on his own terms. As the editors of a recent collection of essays on Adorno point out, he has suffered the ill fate of being taken to the task, on the one hand, by Habermasians for allegedly abandoning the “project” of Enlightenment, and, on the other hand, by academic theorists subscribing to cultural and post-colonial studies who view his critical theory as burdened with an untimely allegiance to a Eurocentric notion of the autonomous subject, and who therefore consider it an outdated and politically compromised mode of inquiry in need of retrospective correction.<sup>2</sup> Such critiques and corrections can be described as (arguably misguided) theoretical attempts to break out of the philosophical schema of a *dialectic of enlightenment* first presented in Adorno and Horkheimer’s eponymous masterpiece. Returning to Adorno means reconsidering the core terms of Adorno’s philosophy, but less in the spirit of correcting

1. Robert Hullot-Kentor, “Back to Adorno,” *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989): 5–29.

2. Donald Burke et al., eds., “Introduction” to *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 4.

and redeeming them and more in the spirit of rediscovering them *as if* for the first time, thus tearing apart the web of prejudices and misunderstandings that has been spun around his work. What the move “back to Adorno” has demonstrated foremost is that no productive reception of his work can do without the concept of dialectics, and “doing dialectics” means, if the most recent scholarship is any indication, to move with Adorno beyond Adorno, and, on the way, ditching the by now annoying habit of pedantically pointing out everything that Adorno got wrong, from jazz to the cinema.

In the Anglophone world, Adorno was canonized not so much due to the second generation of German Critical Theory, but thanks to the pathbreaking works of scholars as diverse as Gillian Rose, Martin Jay, Susan Buck-Morss, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Russell Berman, Andreas Huyssen, and Fredric Jameson. Because of their theoretical advances and historical assessments, Adorno’s works are now being received more widely than ever before. Despite Adorno’s resistance to a systematic and “user-friendly” exposition of philosophical arguments, two new short introductory volumes to his oeuvre, intended primarily for undergraduate readers, will serve as useful and reliable primers.<sup>3</sup> While these and similar introductions to Adorno’s work will do much good in introducing a new generation of students to his writings, the books under review here testify to a growing and sophisticated *philosophical* interest in Adorno, an encouraging sign that he is now receiving more long-due attention in philosophy departments often hostile to the Continental tradition. The books reviewed here all address—in significantly different ways—the persistence of the subject/object dialectic in Adorno’s philosophy, and they also suggest, in various ways, that the theoretical key to a critical understanding of this dialectical relationship lies in Adorno’s use of a concept of experience that clearly has strong Hegelian overtones.

### ***Recovering Experience***

In the introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel famously writes: “*Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience [Erfahrung].*”<sup>4</sup> For Adorno, experience is likewise a dialectical movement, but it is no longer integrated into Hegel’s grand itinerary of spirit’s return to itself. In Adorno’s philosophical universe, spirit does not come home to rest; it remains in motion. In describing his philosophy as “spiritual experience” (the originally intended title for his introduction to

3. See Alex Thomson, *Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2006), and Ross Wilson, *Theodor Adorno* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), p. 55.

his book *Negative Dialectics*), Adorno seeks to conceive of negative dialectics as a philosophy that, in reaching for unmastered, uncontrollable knowledge beyond that which it possesses conceptually, runs up against its limitations and is thus repeatedly and painfully thrown back upon itself. It is bound to remain a philosophy that will not come to a conclusion and will not yield a summary outcome, but at least it will be cognitively enriched by the experience of the limit and the promise of what might be beyond it. Adorno's "failure" to complete his philosophical project is due not to a self-defeating infatuation with fragmentary forms of thought; rather, he writes programmatically from the retrospective point of view of philosophy's having failed to realize itself: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed."<sup>5</sup> This means that incompleteness (as a result of philosophy's missed self-realization) is the premise of Adorno's philosophy, and the *movement* of such a philosophy—which Adorno defines as a form of experience—is not accidental but essential to its theoretical substance and its "truth content."

Roger Foster, in his beautifully written book *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience*, makes a strong argument for appreciating the idea of "spiritual experience" as the primary motive informing Adorno's project of doing philosophy after the end of philosophy. Foster shows that reconstructing "Adorno's negative dialectic as a theory of spiritual experience" (197) requires not only a wide-ranging knowledge of Adorno's writings, including recent publications such as his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, but also a careful analysis of related philosophical and literary attempts in the works of Wittgenstein, Husserl, Benjamin, Bergson, and Proust to "say the unsayable." For Foster, these authors' works must all be understood as (failed) attempts to break out of a prevalent scientific reduction of philosophical conceptuality and truth. Philosophy's reduction to science is the result of what Adorno and Horkheimer describe as the historical process of the dialectic of enlightenment and the growing divergence of image and sign, myth and rationality, art and (scientific) knowledge. Adorno describes the process of this cleft between image and sign as a withering of experience with grave repercussions for the practice of philosophy in its pursuit of wisdom and truth, bemoaning philosophy's defeat by logical positivism. Foster explains that when Adorno uses the term experience (*Erfahrung*, not *Erlebnis*), his goal is not to *define* a concept of experience. Rather, the term is intended as an antidote to the withering of experience, the inevitable outcome of the dialectic of enlightenment viewed as a process of disenchantment, Max Weber's famous term adopted by Adorno and now frequently employed in scholarship on him, perhaps most prominently in Jay Bernstein's influential book *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*.

5. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 3.



Like the majority of Adorno scholars today, Foster subscribes to the theoretical premise of disenchantment, explaining that “the distortion that leads to the harmful consequences of disenchantment occurs when the calculative thinking associated with the purposive practical attitude begins exclusively to usurp the authority to determine when experience can count as cognitively significant. This is when the practical human interest in control over nature takes on the encompassing form of instrumental reason” (10). Foster does not suggest that a recovery of experience as re-enchantment (a reconciliation of nature and calculating rationality) is possible. That is why he is at pains to point out that spiritual experience entails necessarily the experience of coming up short. If, according to Adorno, the essence of philosophy as spiritual experience lies in saying the non-conceptual by means of concepts without reducing it to concepts, then such a paradoxical form of expression aims at a “cognitive utopia”<sup>6</sup>—but it does not, cannot, arrive there. Spiritual experience is engendered in a philosophical encounter with the limits of what can be expressed by concepts, and this encounter, Foster argues, drives philosophy toward self-reflection and a critical awareness (Foster is fond of Adorno’s term *Selbstbesinnung*, which he translates as “self-awareness”) of its own historical conditionedness, the memory of which it had to repress in order to advance as a form of rational knowledge.

Foster explains meticulously that Adorno’s “outbreak attempt” does not amount to a denigration of concepts and a lapse into a potentially irrational intuitionism (a danger inherent in Bergson’s philosophy). What Adorno intended when he introduced the notion of spiritual experience is best understood as an attempt to counter conceptual subsumption (i.e., the priority of the universal over the particular) with the unwavering effort to make the disenchanting concept express more *qua* concept than, under conditions of disenchantment, it can signify *as* concept. This implies that Adorno’s desire to orient his thought along the guidepost of spiritual experience requires him to strongly argue for a re-appreciation of the expressive or rhetorical element in philosophy: “In philosophy, rhetoric represents that which cannot be thought except in language.”<sup>7</sup> For Adorno, thinking dialectically means *writing* dialectically, because the element of expression is crucial to the dialectical movement of thought. Adorno’s recovery of experience entails presenting concepts by means of textual “constellations” and “configurations” so that, enriched with contextual significance, they can express more than merely their presumably already “given” propositional content. What Adorno says about Hegel is also true for his own philosophy: “The expressive element . . . represents experience.”<sup>8</sup>

6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20 vols., ed. Rolf Tiedemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), 5:368.

### *Dialectics and Deconstruction*

It is remarkable how faithful Foster's analysis remains to Adorno's own formulations without merely paraphrasing them, and it merits mention that he resists the temptation of lazily equating Adorno's attention to linguistic nuance and equivocation with seemingly similar but nonetheless quite different deconstructive textual practices.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Foster's carefully crafted account, the literary scholar and Frankfurt School expert Gerhard Richter, in his new book *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life*, cooks up a stew of deconstruction and critical theory that would not pass muster in Foster's more orderly shop. Richter's chapter on the image of Hitler in *Minima Moralia* weighs down Adorno's acerbic aphoristic style with so much Derridean stylistic imitation and terminology that its author's presumed intention to present new insights into the "thought-image" (*Denkbild*: a term and genre used by Benjamin, Kracauer, Bloch, and Adorno) as a mixture of philosophy, literature, journalism, and criticism, simply fizzles. In his introduction, Richter tries to argue that analyzing thought-images as literature "is an eminently political act with properly political stakes—even when a literary text at first seems to have little or no political content" (26). Richter's claim about the inherent political nature of literature is meant as a defense against anti-theoretical trends in today's corporate university; trends that demand "immediate transparency in which . . . people are taught to valorize instant clarity" and "[w]henever writing and thinking fail to conform to this demand of immediate transparency they are met with intolerance or even hostility" (24). While this is, at first glance, a valid defense of often necessarily complex theoretical language, there is also such a thing as unnecessarily pretentious theoretical language that would be better served by a more disciplined adherence to the values of stylistic and conceptual clarity. Richter's own style belongs to this latter category. Why is that?

The first reason is that his desire to stress the rhetorical rather than the propositional dimension of Adorno's writing allows him to uncritically accept the false idea that what counts is not the content of what he writes on *Minima Moralia* but *only* the form. Richter is fond of claiming that thoughts or thought-images are "enacted" or "performed," and he seeks to appropriate the notion of performance for his own style of writing, in effect suggesting that he, like Adorno or Bloch, is *also* an author of thought-images: "I will . . . advance my argument not

9. This does not mean that a deconstructive or Derridean reading of Adorno cannot be productive. Books such as Eric Krakauer's *The Disposition of the Subject: Reading Adorno's Dialectic of Technology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998) or Alexander García Düttmann's *So ist es: Ein philosophischer Kommentar zu Adorno's Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004) demonstrate that the application of deconstructive tropes and a discerning eye for aporias and paradoxes can yield significant insights into Adorno's thought.

by taking recourse to the teleology of a putatively stable narrative linearity, but rather by placing a series of excessive excursions and obsessive digressions into strategic constellations where they illuminate each other in a number of relations that perpetually realign themselves. In short, this chapter performs its arguments through an Adornean parataxis” (150). That this reads almost like a parody of Adorno’s statements about the use of language in philosophical discourse need not be pointed out.

The second reason for the frustrating lack of rigor in Richter’s style is his blind reliance on deconstructive topoi. For example, instead of a critical appropriation of Derridean notions such as *iterability* or *Nachträglichkeit*, Richter succumbs to an exaggerated reliance on temporal clichés such as “always already” and “always yet to come,” thereby (unintentionally?) mimicking Derrida’s late style. The result of this is what one could call Richter’s “jargon of authentic temporality”: a vaguely messianic, pseudo-philosophical language that implicitly, in its use of the future perfect tense (“will have asked of us” [145]), suggests an ethics of thinking and writing. Formulations such as “[w]riting in the shadow of the proper name Hitler *requires learning to read* [my emphasis] these other proper names, among so many others” (170) imply a deferred temporality by alluding to an action (here: the practice of reading attentively and critically) that must first be learned and thus succumbs to the temporal logic of a “not yet.” The implied ethics consist in nothing more than an *appeal* for something that must take place but is, as of yet, still impossible. Richter’s elevated and vaguely moral tone—sometimes bordering on the pompous—should not distract from the fact that his account of “Adorno’s Hitler in *Minima Moralia*” is strangely devoid of politics and history. Richter never addresses why and how life has been reduced to “damaged life,” i.e., he ignores the subjective *and* objective, the particular *and* universal experiential causes of damaged life. Instead, history and experience are reduced to the abstract temporal structure of “afterness,” which in turn is further reduced to the activity of *writing* after the disaster, bracketing the dilemma of *living on*, the crux of an ethics after Auschwitz, according to Adorno’s “Meditation on Metaphysics.”<sup>10</sup>

In her book *The End of Art*, Eva Geulen has shown that Adorno’s philosophy can indeed be read according to the temporal and cognitive structure of afterness, afterthought, afterlife, survival, and epilogue, and Richter does not offer much that adds to Geulen’s insights.<sup>11</sup> More problematically, however, Richter’s sole attention to temporality as linguistic structure ends up reducing Nazi politics to just another instance of the alleged corporate terror of clarity. For Richter, it is not the content of Adorno’s thought that is anti-fascist, but simply the fact that it is hard to understand, that it is, in Richter’s formulation, “perpetually in need

10. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 363.

11. See Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor after Hegel*, trans. James McFarland (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2006), pp. 90–111.

of understanding.” Adorno’s thought-images “hover undecidably between different readings,” and it is just this undecidability that makes Adorno’s thoughts “unusable for the concept machines of Hitlerism” (172). In reducing Nazism to the terror of “concept machines” and, by implication, anti-Nazism to the mere refusal of certainty and determinacy, Richter unwittingly diminishes Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* to a deconstructive inside joke. That Adorno’s politics consisted in much more than merely the nominal disavowal of dangerous metaphysical categories and reified identity thinking has been demonstrated in recent scholarship on Adorno’s politics.<sup>12</sup> Richter’s book is proof that while it is tempting to assimilate Adorno’s dialectical thought with poststructuralist themes and tropes, there is the peril of bracketing the historical and political stakes of texts such as *Minima Moralia*. It is one thing to claim, as Richter does, citing Adorno’s “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” that *Minima Moralia*, “like a lyric poem . . . ‘reveals itself to be most deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing.’” (151). It is another thing to actually show *how* Adorno’s text is “deeply grounded in society.” Unfortunately, Richter does not provide evidence for his claim that philosophy is most socially and politically relevant when we read it as literature.

*Thought-Images* does little to dispel the suspicion that deconstruction has less in common with Adorno’s philosophy than is often claimed. Derrida himself, in accepting the receipt of the Theodor W. Adorno Prize in 2001, only confirmed that suspicion when, oddly, he defended his long-sustained lack of interest in Adorno by pointing out that his assessment of Heidegger’s legacy in light of the “political tragedy of the two countries . . . goes in a quite different direction and responds to quite different demands”<sup>13</sup> than Adorno’s. It seems that when deconstruction and Adorno meet, Heidegger gets in the way. A case in point is Richter’s superfluous reference to Heidegger’s discussion of the relationship between the German words *denken* and *danken* and his claim that “Heidegger’s intuitions about the inexorable imbrication of thinking, thanking, writing, and memorializing in language help us to understand the debts that Adorno’s *Dichtung*, *Minima Moralia*, owes to the thinking and thanking that Horkheimer’s gift occasioned” (163). This claim gets the significance of Heidegger’s thought for Adorno wrong, because it was precisely Heidegger’s penchant to act as if the mere *invocation* of a word amounted to intuiting a concealed truth that filled Adorno with unease, as his anti-Heidegger polemic, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, documents.

12. See Russell Berman, “Adorno’s Politics,” in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, ed. Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 110–31, and Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

13. Jacques Derrida, “*Fichus*: Frankfurt Address,” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP), p. 177.

### *Uneasy Affinities: Heidegger and Adorno, Sartre and Adorno*

On the upper left-hand corner, an intentionally blurry but unmistakably identifiable photographic picture of Adorno, and below it a barely discernible, ghostlike apparition of a human head, gray on a black background: that is the cover design of the volume *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, edited by the philosopher Iain Macdonald and the literary scholar Krzysztof Ziarek. The design of the cover suggests that every attempt to examine commonalities between the two most influential German philosophers in the twentieth century, Adorno and Heidegger, must confront the simple empirical fact that Heidegger did not read any of Adorno's works, whom, in private conversation, he once dismissed as a mere "sociologist." Adorno, on the other hand, was intimately familiar with Heidegger's writings, and already Adorno's earliest works, such as his essays "The Actuality of Philosophy" (1931) and "The Idea of Natural History" (1932), are highly critical responses to Heidegger's ontology, especially to his concept of historicity, which, for Adorno, presented an unwitting relapse into an idealist identity of subject and object. In later works, especially *Negative Dialectics* and *Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno eloquently tried to dismantle Heidegger's thought as part of a larger postwar trend toward irrational "restorative philosophies"<sup>14</sup> and rejected what he viewed as Heidegger's attempt to fraudulently "ontologize the ontic."<sup>15</sup> For Adorno, Heidegger's attempt to overcome more than two thousand years of Western metaphysics tried to take the easy way out: to simply "turn back the clock"<sup>16</sup> rather than to acknowledge the undeniable forces of history and tradition, seeking, as Adorno preferred, to undo them from within, by means of immanent critique.

Apart from their intellectual differences, both stood at opposite sides of world history: Adorno had to emigrate from Germany to save his life, Heidegger, in 1933, sought to further his philosophical agenda and his career by collaborating with Germany's fascist leaders. In 1963, in an act of political self-defense, Adorno denied even the possibility of a comparison between their respective philosophies: "Anyone who reviews the continuity of my work will not be able to compare me with Heidegger, whose philosophy is fascist into its innermost cells."<sup>17</sup> It is unlikely that Adorno seriously thought that Heidegger's philosophy was fascist; but he no doubt used Heidegger as a foil to develop and accentuate his own ideas, and one can therefore say that Adorno needed Heidegger as his philosophical antagonist. Adorno saw in Heidegger his foremost rival, and he would not have expended as much energy on attacking him if he had not sensed

14. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 68.

15. See *ibid.*, pp. 115–31.

16. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 112.

17. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19:638.

that, despite their conflicting philosophical goals, there were nonetheless significant shared concerns.

In 1981, Heidegger's student Hermann Mörchen published a 700-page study titled *Adorno und Heidegger: Untersuchung einer philosophischen Kommunikationsverweigerung*. The title of Mörchen's book states in programmatic fashion the basic assumption behind the posthumous interest in the relationship between the two thinkers: if the antagonism between them is merely the result of a *refusal to communicate*, then their antagonism can be remedied by a reconstruction of the missed communication.<sup>18</sup> Mörchen's book offers such a reconstructed communication in the form of an exhaustive catalog of Adorno's references to and major arguments against Heidegger (in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*, Heidegger's name is mentioned about 550 times), as well as a list of "convergences in Heidegger's and Adorno's thought." Among those are: similar critiques of subjectivist, rationalist value theories; sustained resistances to the idea of philosophy as science; a shared rejection of philosophical systems and an embrace of essayistic forms of expression; attempts to revive philosophy through a practice of linguistic expression that undercuts the dominating values of clarity and communicability (the latter, of course, calls into question Mörchen's reliance on the notion of "communication"). Dwelling on points of convergence between Heidegger and Adorno can be a productive way to sharpen our understanding of various aspects of their respective philosophies, focusing, inevitably, on their respective core concepts of "Being" and the "non-identical," and it can help illuminate some of the most pertinent issues of Continental philosophy in the twentieth century, such as the possibilities of aesthetic experience and of alternate forms of rationality in works of art. Since, as Mörchen's book was the first to demonstrate, it is impossible to treat the relationship between Adorno and Heidegger in a summary fashion, the contributors to Macdonald and Ziarek's volume focus on various isolated aspects; as a result, the book is rather uneven. The editors repeatedly invoke "points of proximity," "intersecting concerns," "resemblances," and "a

18. For a deconstruction of Mörchen's notion of communication in favor of a comparative investigation of Adorno's and Heidegger's philosophies as attempts to come to terms with historical events as names (for Adorno, "Auschwitz"; for Heidegger, "Germania") and, vice versa, names as effecting events, see Alexander García Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker (New York: Continuum, 2002). For a good summary of Adorno's arguments against Heidegger, see Dieter Thomä, "Verhältnis zur Ontologie: Adornos Denken des Unbegrifflichen," in *Theodor W. Adorno: Negative Dialektik*, ed. Axel Honneth and Christoph Menke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), pp. 29–48. Helpful also is Samir Gandesha's fair-minded "Leaving Home: On Adorno and Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 101–28. The most comprehensive treatment on the topic in English is given in Fred Dallmayr, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1991).



deeper commonality.” They find the latter in Adorno’s and Heidegger’s shared “imperative that philosophy should serve history and experience, that it should be concerned with ‘relevant things’” (2–3). Yet despite sharing an intellectual point of departure in Husserl’s phenomenology, the presumed “convergences” between Adorno and Heidegger remain elusive, and at the end of their introduction, Macdonald and Ziarek settle for “parallels that exist between their respective approaches” (5).

As informative as some of the individual essays are, they all inevitably play off one thinker against the other, and their specific arguments often appear to be limited to a select audience of experts. Missing from this collection of essays is a piece that sheds new light on the form in which Adorno engaged with Heidegger, since it was *in critiquing* Heidegger’s ontology that Adorno sought to develop his presentation of the “necessity of dialectical thought.”<sup>19</sup> As Ziarek points out in his contribution, Adorno’s critique of Heidegger faulted the latter for not having a concept of critique,<sup>20</sup> and it might have been productive to analyze Adorno’s objections to Heidegger in context and in detail. Ziarek’s essay instead goes in a different direction. He shows that Heidegger’s theory of the work of art as event contains a radically different notion of critique, or, as he puts it, “an otherwise to critique”: “If critique is still a form of negativity and domination, and thus part of the operations of power, the event at work in art can, by contrast, unfold prior to the instantiation of power, that is, in a rupture, whose critical force is, paradoxically, emptied and freed of power” (122). From an Adornian point of view, such an assessment neglects what is necessary for the exercise of critique: an analysis of *concrete* relations of power with regard to the individual and society within a specific historical context.

Could it be that precisely the concern with “relevant things”—cited in the editors’ introduction—separates Adorno from Heidegger irreconcilably? The philosopher David Sherman, in his book *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity*, thinks so. For Sherman, the recent searches for, as he calls it, a “rapprochement” between Adorno and Heidegger are a worrisome “sign of the political times.” As an example, Sherman cites Jay Bernstein’s claim, made in *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, that with the promises of liberal democracy and market economy fulfilled, “there is now no viable or available alternative to them” (cited in Sherman, 56). Only by means of opportunistic concessions to the status quo, i.e., by bracketing the sociohistorical (and perhaps also the theological, one might add) dimension of Adorno’s thought (with its indefatigable attempts to orient philosophical thought according to the ideas of reconciliation and redemption) can Adorno and Heidegger be brought together. Sherman, for his part, insists on the incompatible difference between the two: Heidegger wants to

19. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik*, p. 114.

20. See *ibid.*, pp. 116–17.



abandon metaphysics immanently, by curing thought from its malaise of *Seinsvergessenheit* (“forgetting of being,” with a double genitive), while Adorno seeks to transcend metaphysics “which entails striving to transcend the antagonistic social conditions that nourish it” (53). Adorno’s transcending of metaphysics does not entail, Sherman maintains, abandoning the subject/object paradigm, and claims that Adorno and Heidegger both “reject the category of subjectivity” (53) are incorrect. Rather, Adorno sees in Heidegger’s attempt to subordinate subjectivity to Being, his *Seinshörigkeit*, a futile expression of the wish to escape the prison of subjectivity. Only subjective self-awareness (*Selbstbesinnung*), a reflection on the subjective share in what is purportedly wholly other to it, will diminish the subject’s “spell”: the oppressive power that it exerts and under which it suffers.<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, a refutation of the Adorno/Heidegger rapprochement is not the main objective of Sherman’s book. He is primarily concerned with arguing for a “mediated subjectivity” as a way out of what he perceives as a postmodernist and poststructuralist failure to conceptualize an active subject capable of political agency. His approach owes more to Adorno than to Sartre: he seeks to remedy Hegel’s privileging of the universal by conceptualizing mediation as activity grounded in “the existing individual subject” (5). However, for all his insistence that the subject is not “merely a harmful fiction,” and that philosophy therefore cannot do without “the moment of agency inherent in the first-person standpoint” (7), Sherman’s account is, to use one of his favorite terms, only nominally “socio-historical.” And his attack on postmodernist rejections of subjectivity overstates the matter: a theoretical “decentering” of the subject does not automatically imply a rejection of political agency. The strength of Sherman’s book lies, instead, in analytically deft reconsiderations of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* and Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, arguing that both offer different but ultimately parallel approaches to a “mediated subjectivity” indispensable for any theory of emancipatory social practices.

Comparing Sartre and Adorno, however, entails methodological, conceptual, and historiographical problems not unlike those encountered in Adorno’s rivalry with Heidegger. We do not learn from Sherman’s book whether Sartre ever showed any interest in Adorno’s work, and Sherman only considers what Adorno has to say about Sartre in *Negative Dialectics* and in his essay “Commitment” (1962) but not in his lectures and letters, which show Adorno’s continued response to Sartre throughout the latter half of his life.<sup>22</sup> In Sherman’s 328-page

21. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 68.

22. For important references to Sartre not considered by Sherman, see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927–1969*, vol. 3, 1945–1949, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), pp. 429–30, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), pp. 101 and 105.

volume, only three pages address Adorno's critiques of Sartre, which, in Sherman's account, boil down to "a replay of his prior attack on Kierkegaard" (76). In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno describes Sartre's existentialism as merely the "most recent attempt to break out of conceptual fetishism."<sup>23</sup> For Adorno, Sartre's "extreme nominalism" still falls back into the "old idealist category of the free act of the subject,"<sup>24</sup> and, in what can only be described as a mixture of political myopia and wishful thinking, Sartre would seek to remedy the individual's objective exclusion from social power by pushing Kierkegaard's category of decision: "The notion of absolute freedom of choice is as illusory as that of the absolute I as the world's source has ever been."<sup>25</sup> Sherman wants to defend Sartre against Adorno's critique, and he does so by showing that "Sartre's (phenomenological) concept of the subject is structurally analogous to Adorno's" (77), and that, in turn, Adorno's concept of freedom "bear[s] more than a passing resemblance" (249) to Sartre's. Further, Sherman suggests that Adorno's and Sartre's differences are primarily methodological: Adorno conceptualizes the individual from what Sherman describes as a "third-person dialectical approach, undertaken from the standpoint of a sedimented history," but Adorno's approach nonetheless "presupposes the individual in much the same way that Sartre's first-person dialectical approach, undertaken from the phenomenological standpoint, presupposes the sedimented history that has made it." Sherman is convinced that Adorno's and Sartre's perspectives are not only reconcilable, but that they complement each other and finally merge in a shared notion of the individual as a "work of art ceaselessly in progress" (281).

Whereas the essays in *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions* tend to favor one thinker over the other, Sherman is even-handed almost to an extreme: he downplays Adorno's criticisms of Sartre, and he glosses over Sartre's indifference toward Adorno. His book is hence more a defense of Sartre as a dialectical (i.e., non-naïve) thinker than an evaluation of how Adorno sought to position himself vis-à-vis Sartre. Missing is, in particular, a consideration of the relationship between art and politics. Clearly, Adorno's aesthetics of form cannot be reconciled with Sartre's aesthetics of content and his "theater of ideas," and it is precisely in the realm of aesthetics that Adorno is closer to a conservative writer like Valéry than to Sartre. And, it should be added, also closer to Heidegger, whom he defended on occasion. For example, in criticizing Rudolf Borchardt's prioritizing of *Dichtung* over art, Adorno approvingly refers to Heidegger's sober discussion of the "thingly element in the work [of art],"<sup>26</sup> without which "even the

23. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 49.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 18.

often invoked aesthetic experience [*Erlebnis*] cannot do.”<sup>27</sup> In the final analysis, Adorno’s philosophy is probably closer to Heidegger’s than to Sartre’s, but the only way to properly analyze and judge Adorno’s proximity to Heidegger is to remove it from the trappings of a merely affirmative cataloging of affinities (as in Mörchen and Dallmayr) as well as from a purely polemical dismissal of their similarities (Sherman). An alternative is offered in Alastair Morgan’s important book *Adorno’s Concept of Life*.

### ***A Philosophy of Life***

In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno offers his philosophy modestly as a series of aphoristic “reflections from damaged life,” and subsequently he never developed a coherent *concept* of life. Morgan’s book therefore does not aim to provide a monolithic Adornian theory of life. Rather, he shows that there are different ways in which Adorno conceptualizes life, he skillfully indicates the major intellectual contexts and influences of Adorno’s thought on life (which range widely from Aristotle to Hegel to Bergson), and he situates the latter in relation to ethical concerns in works by Michel Henry, Emmanuel Levinas, Giorgio Agamben, John McDowell, and Jay Bernstein. Morgan’s book is too rich for easy summary, but a few aspects are particularly worth noting. Morgan does not fall for simple oppositions, and he consistently offers a view of Adorno’s philosophy that is devoid of political or theoretical partisanship. *Adorno’s Concept of Life* shows no traces of the “jargon of temporality” so prevalent in Richter’s book, it opens up a much wider theoretical perspective than Sherman’s and Foster’s books, and it manages to pin down what is most significant in Adorno’s response to Heidegger’s ontology. The crux is that while Adorno agrees with Heidegger that the truth of philosophy lies in its attempt to “express what is inexpressible” (48), Adorno’s rejection of Heidegger’s ontology is based on a misunderstanding of what Heidegger means by Being: not something primary and immediate that is beyond or prior to the subject/object duality, but rather something that “is never totally present or immediate, but always oscillating between a revealing-concealing mode of appearance” (47). Adorno’s misunderstanding of Heidegger’s concept does not disqualify his fully legitimate critique of Being as severed from any relation to history. But, as Morgan argues, Adorno’s rejection of Heidegger robs him of the opportunity to ask “how . . . thinking or experiencing the non-identical differ[s] from the never present, always half-glimpsed experience of the question of the meaning of Being” (49). Morgan is not the first to lament Adorno’s (and Heidegger’s) failure to ask that question, but he points in a promising direction toward adequately addressing it. While it cannot be answered within the parameters of the Adorno/Heidegger relation, it does appear in Adorno’s works in a different guise, as the problem of a possibility of metaphysical experience that itself is conditioned on a new

27. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10.1:446.

“material metaphysics”: “The questions that arise from Adorno’s critique of Heidegger are how we can think of this metaphysical experience in material terms, as an experience of emphatic life, even within the bounds of reified life” (50).

Adorno’s ideas concerning the possibility of “metaphysical experience” under the conditions of the “fall” of metaphysics into materialism mark the limits of his “Meditations on Metaphysics.” While he has no doubt that, after Auschwitz, philosophy can no longer deal with metaphysical questions unless it can rediscover them in the lowest strata of material existence, Adorno is not sure how, as a “damaged” adult subject, one can conduct an inquiry into materialist metaphysics: “As a child, I believe, one still knows something about this [material-metaphysical] stratum—with the dim knowledge children have of such things. It is the zone which later materialized literally in the concentration camps; as a child one had an inkling of it when the dog-catcher’s van drove by.”<sup>28</sup> Metaphysical experience, Adorno insists, is still possible, but only in the form of a failed expectation and a question, for example when the child, seduced by the promise of happiness conveyed by the elusive sound of a place name, realizes that “the promised” [*das Versprochene*] is not there: “Being really there makes the promised recede like a rainbow. And yet one is not disappointed; the feeling now is one of being too close, rather, and not seeing it for that reason.”<sup>29</sup> And even if the broken promise results in the sheer negativity of feeling let down, this “failure” is not the end of metaphysical experience. The question “Can this be all?”<sup>30</sup> does not shut off once and for all the possibility of metaphysical experience. As Morgan puts it, “Only at a point of exhaustion in the dialectical contradictions is the experience of possibility registered in the utterance of the exhausted metaphysical experience, ‘is that all?’ . . . This is not . . . an affirmative concept of potentiality, but an opening to the possibility of a future, the possibility that things might be altered” (106).

Morgan’s book concludes with a comparative reading of different figures of “exhausted life” in Adorno’s treatments of Beckett, Proust, and Kafka,<sup>31</sup> and he concludes that while the “lack of fulfillment constitutive of the metaphysical experience” is conditioned on a passive subject incapable of political action, Adorno’s metaphysical experience is nonetheless not, to cite Martin Jay, an “experience without a subject.”<sup>32</sup> To Foster’s account of a “recovery of experience” must

28. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, p. 117. See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 366.

29. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 373.

30. *Ibid.*

31. The notion of an exhausted dialectic, a critical element in the formation of Adorno’s late style, also informs my reading of Adorno’s lecture on Goethe’s *Iphigenia*. See Ulrich Plass, “Exhaustion: Goethe,” in *Language and History in Theodor W. Adorno’s Notes to Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 153–73.

32. On this paradoxical notion, see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004).

thus be added an important qualifier: "Such a moment of recovery can only be theorized in terms of a bodily experience itself, a basis, a locus, to which human experience always returns, but in a reified form. This is not a return to an originary potentiality, but a body exhausted with all it embodies, which, nevertheless, in the painful realization of its own fragility as subjectivity, is opened toward the possibility of a different form of life" (136). While Morgan's conclusion remains tentative, his attempt to argue that Adorno's concept of life cannot do without a turn to undertheorized strata of experience opens up a potentially productive perspective on the future of dialectical thought. Morgan's optimistic book shows that thinking with Adorno beyond Adorno entails a renewed philosophical attention to neglected variants of experience. What we can still learn from Adorno is the necessity of metaphysical experience, precisely because it is fallible, since it is only in the moment of something not happening against our hopeful expectation that we fully realize the legitimacy, perhaps even the necessity, of our failed metaphysical expectation. In confronting the ubiquity of forms of life today that are managed and administered, impoverished and denigrated, a philosophy of life has nothing hopeful to sustain it except for the possibility of expressing a small but illuminating difference from the catastrophic norm. After Adorno, this is the promise of metaphysical experience as an attempt to break out of damaged life.

# *Utopia, Imagination, and a Crisis of Culture: Previewing the Future through Fiction*

Lynita K. Newswander

Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005. Pp. xvi + 431.

The future of society, like any other structure, is built piece by piece. Whether conscious of it or not, the ability of each person to think reflexively about the past today lays the foundations for tomorrow. This is certainly evident in the spheres of education and politics, for example, where there are many who are self-aware of their role in “inventing the future.” However, creative practices in literature and imagination are also sites for architects of what is possible for the future. On the micro-level, humanity and society are shaped by the forms of society’s collective imaginations: they may be positive or negative, full of hope or full of fear. Because it can take readers where reason cannot go, imagination is often the only guide. When it comes to envisioning the future, then, the creative capacity, in conjunction with history and current context, is especially valuable. In fact, without it, visions of the future would not be possible. This tension among past, present, and future is the theme of Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. In this collection of previously published essays (with the addition of “The Desire Called Utopia,” an essay that makes up the first 200-plus pages of the compiled text), Jameson poses important questions about the role and limits of art and creativity in the formations of the future (utopian and otherwise). The result is a critical look at science fiction as the art of the possible and a critique of the social context that restricts imagination. But the book contains a contradiction between his broader utopian hypothesis and his idea that imagination is in a state of crisis, limited by its own cultural creations.

## ***Crisis of Imagination or Imaginary Crisis?***

For Jameson, “[u]topias seem to be the by-products of western modernity” (11), the politics of which aim at “imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system

radically different from this one” (xii). He sees Marcuse as the most influential utopian of the 1960s, a time when utopian imaginings were not limited to fiction. Because utopia itself as an ideal is elevated above the kinds of concerns society cannot seem to look past (satisfying false needs, appropriating power, etc.), the lens of a utopian aesthetic allows for a more critical view of the current social-political everydayness of life than most people are capable of on their own.

Philip K. Dick, a favorite science fiction author of Jameson’s and the subject of several of the essays included in this book, said that he wrote science fiction because in it “[he] can play with the universe like it’s silly putty.”<sup>1</sup> In the artistic representation of reality, authors and readers gain a critical perspective on the social and political normalization that effectively blinds the imagination. Art is inherently political because it is always more than an objective snapshot of life-as-usual. Writing as described by both Dick and Jameson is active participation in political struggles, not by agitation but by changing perceptions and motivations of individual readers in imaginative ways that involve venturing to hope for something better than the world as it is.

But the cultural changes Marcuse complained of in *One Dimensional Man* banished imagination from the realm of reality and limited it to speculation. As Jameson sees it, the state of utopian thinking today is not just a political crisis, but also “a more general crisis of representation attributed to the advent of post-modernity” (212). In this book he deals with the dichotomy of the great political potential of utopian thinking and its simultaneous struggle to rise above the current context to imagine at all.

Part of the problem in talking about utopia is that it is both a political and a literary fascination, as Jameson notes. But it cannot be fully the realm of either. Utopian visions bring together the political with the aesthetic for a formative purpose. Jameson’s argument is that in the current context the incompatibility of the two cancels each other out, leaving readers unable to imagine a perfect state of society. As stated by Marcuse<sup>2</sup> and noted by Jameson, technological mediation and electronic distraction have a flattening effect that replaces diversity of thought and expression with cookie-cutter versions of themselves. As noted by Horkheimer and Adorno<sup>3</sup> as well as Marcuse, by inundating its subjects with the same sights, sounds, and themes, the culture industry has created generations that not only share a media background, but are formed by it. While this sameness may be useful in industry and education, it has obvious problematic implications for

1. Gregg Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words* (Long Beach, CA: Fragments West/The Valentine Press, 1984), p. 46.

2. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

3. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979).



creativity. Furthermore, creativity requires freedom of thought and the time and space to create, which Marcuse argues is increasingly difficult to come by as the culture industry has taken over leisure time by filling it with advertising and false needs. As Jameson sees it, society-at-large has a “constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself... as the result of the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners” (289). According to him, people are prisoners to the extent that they cannot escape—physically or psychologically—from the influence of technological and cultural mediation. Even the most imaginative attempts at constructing utopia are “little more than the projections of our own social moment and historical or subjective situation” (211).

In both “The Desire Called Utopia” and “Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?” Jameson’s main concern is with the difficulty (or, as he claims, inability) that even artists have in envisioning a utopian future. For him, the “deepest vocation” of science fiction is to test the boundaries of these limitations. He says the utopian subgenre works to

demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove on closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the *Utopian imagination*, the imagination of otherness and radical difference; to succeed by failure, and to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for a mediation, which, setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits. (288–89, emphasis in original)

Jameson’s recognition of the existence of limits of the imagination is distinctly anti-utopian. It is contrary to the idea of utopia, which exists in “no place” and so is governed by no rules, to suggest that it is subject to “absolute limits” or stuck in the “all-too-familiar.” With this assertion, Jameson reveals the limits of his own utopianism and betrays a belief that utopian visions are hardly possible, let alone efficacious in reality. This point of view ignores the material effects of utopian fictions like *Ecotopia*,<sup>4</sup> for example. While Jameson’s point about the sanctity and perhaps scarcity of imagination of a desire for utopia is well-taken, his declaration of its demise is distinctly anti-utopian.

Even critics of utopian imaginations agree that visions of the future cannot be limited by social or political context. Although Immanuel Wallerstein’s idea of utopistics focuses on “the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human

4. Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (Berkeley, CA: Banyan Tree Books, 1975).

creativity,”<sup>5</sup> in direct contradiction to the emancipated imaginations of science fiction, he agrees that “still, it should be intrinsically possible to envisage a social world in which [real world problems] had become almost minor, instead of continuing to be fundamental to the operation of the historical system as they currently are.”<sup>6</sup> Even a realist like Wallerstein understands the transcendent capacity of imagination and innovation to overcome real-world social evils. Speculation, in science fiction or elsewhere, can and must conquer the obstacles of politics and ideology that would keep it from being productive. Short of this capability for transcendence, speculation is little more than observation.

Jameson’s underlying pessimism also contradicts Dick’s optimistic view of the science fiction writer as an “introverted activist.”<sup>7</sup> For Dick, the writer of science fiction is a sort of hero who unassumingly undermines the politics of the present by presenting thoughtful alternatives for the future. He says the science fiction writer “is a dreamer with one eye open, always coldly appraising what is actually going on. And yet he thinks, ‘It doesn’t have to be this way. Because what if . . .’”<sup>8</sup> By imagining the future and publishing the possibilities for a better world, the utopian imagination of writers can actually *shape* it.

While it is true that technological advances increase the mediation of daily life, to say that entire populations are its “prisoners” is to give too much credit to machines and not enough to the genius of (wo)man who made them. Perhaps people are hindered in their abilities to contemplate the future by normalization through technology; but the mental capacity for critical thinking and creativity certainly makes humanity capable of thought that cannot be policed or disabled. What is utopian fiction if not a glimpse at the “good place”—something better than reality? No matter their motivations, the very existence of utopian thinkers is a testament against the kind of ideological prison that Jameson would have us believe holds captive the thoughts of this generation. Even Marcuse admits that the aesthetic dimension enjoys a space apart from the commodifying effects of the rest of society.<sup>9</sup> According to him, art can be a powerful tool for critique and the subversion of popular ideologies. As a stronghold of the imagination, the aesthetic is uniquely powerful. Jameson’s critical thesis is surprisingly anti-utopian because it suggests that hopeful visions of the future are all but impossible.

5. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics, or Historical Choices of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 1–2.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

7. Lawrence Sutin, ed., *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), p. 74.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

9. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

### *Science Fiction*

In many ways, the aesthetic dimension is the only mode available for the contemplation of utopia. Like any invention, a perfect society can never exist in the realm of the rational until it is first invented in the mind's eye. Although Jameson chooses to focus on literature—specifically, science fiction—as the site for this creation, the possibility for utopian thought must necessarily exist in all aesthetic works. As a representation of imagination (separate from what Jameson calls “Fancy”), the aesthetic is able to capture human creativity and emotion in its purity. Through paint, ink, paper, or other materials, aesthetic works are able to speak a simple language that can be uncomplicated (although often inspired) by political concerns. This makes art an ideal carrier for utopia—a concept of future time and other space, which may involve politics but is mainly concerned with the structure of everyday living.

Within this context of a general recognition of the utopian possibilities of art, Jameson's approach to the low culture of science fiction destabilizes the notion of “literary criticism” which generally would discount popular genres as non-literary. But though he appropriately negates this strict definition of “literature” worthy of the title, Jameson ignores the utopian/dystopian novels that *are* widely accepted by literary scholars. His omission of contemporary literary utopian texts, such as those by Ayn Rand, is glaring and contradicts his own definition of literature and imagination as distinct from fantasy. *Anthem*, for example, is a realistic text that some might even classify as science fiction.<sup>10</sup> Still, Jameson fails to recognize the value of it, and other “high” literature utopias like it, as a presentation of alternative reality.

By limiting his focus to works of science fiction, Jameson effectively puts them into the same iconoclastic category as More's *Utopia*. However, the privileged connections between science fiction and utopia are not always clear. In differentiating between the power of science fiction versus the power of high literature to address utopian themes, he says, “[t]he latter can show us everything about the individual psyche and its subjective experience and alienation, save the essential—the logic of stereotypes, reproductions and depersonalization in which the individual is held in our own time ‘like a bird caught in cobwebs’ (*Ubik*)” (348). What else is fiction but imagining alternatives, and, as Dick mentions, asking “what if?” Jameson fails to provide strong reasoning for limiting his literary focus to science fiction. In fact, by suggesting that utopian thought is not completely possible outside of the realm of science fiction, he discounts texts that are the basis for what many people think of utopia. Even More's *Utopia* itself does not fit into the genre of science fiction because it confines itself to its own time and space. Yes, it is an imagined community, but one that fits better in the realm of realistic, rather than science, fiction. Jameson argues that through the futuristic

10. Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (New York: Signet, 1986).

lens of science fiction, people can see themselves more objectively, and in fiction, they can play with questions too complex to be limited to positivist contemplation. This must necessarily be true of all fiction that dares to be utopian.

And what about unrealistic works, those derided by Jameson as “fanciful”? The arguments that Jameson makes for science fiction as an ideal home for utopian thinking are magnified in works of fantasy. While science fiction is limited by the “realistic” imagination of what could be the reality of the future, fantasy is not bound to realism at all. Fanciful fiction does not presuppose any connections to geography, science, or society as we know it, and so provides a clean slate for thinking and writing about alternatives. Elitist utopians like Wallerstein may argue that fantasy-utopias are not valuable because of their limited applicability to reality. However, the distinction between science fiction and fantasy is not as clear as Jameson makes it out to be. If readers ought to suspend reality for a moment to contemplate possibilities presented to them through science fiction, as Jameson suggests, then why not apply the same standard to fantasy novels and short stories, which, as products of the imagination (silly putty in the hands of writers, as Dick suggests) should be regarded with similar respect?

Again and again Jameson insists that science fiction is the only artistic genre today that has been able to “rediscover its own utopian vocation,” creating a unique “relationship to social history,” which ought to be “interrogated and decoded” (289). But here, as in other instances, he chooses to ignore the influence of other literary utopian genres and focuses instead on science fiction as the only legitimate vehicle of utopia. In limiting his scope and refusing to acknowledge the social and political impact of non-science-fiction utopian/dystopian authors, Jameson is limited by his own personal affinities.

Politics and speculation are not only the realms of science fiction. What Jameson says of the liberating potential for science fiction also exists in other genres of literature. As Dick notes, science fiction has a limited readership, and its emphasis on content over style<sup>11</sup> does not necessarily privilege it above other kinds of literary imaginings. Whether the genre is science fiction or otherwise, however, the indictment is the same: If political and social life now is at such a point that it hinders our visions of a perfect future, the problem is not with our creative capacity—as Jameson suggests—but with the context that shuts it down.

Despite its unjustified prejudice, Jameson’s application of a type of literary critique to the perhaps underappreciated literature of science fiction is insightful and effectively stretches the boundaries of what is possible in literary criticism. While he clearly demonstrates a deep understanding of critical theory, Jameson’s essays are motivated by what seems to be curiosity and admiration more than pure academic pursuit. Because of its fascination with the future, Jameson argues that science fiction is a likely home for the subgenre of what has never been the past.

11. Sutin, *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, p. 63.

Moreover, science fiction is comfortable in its position of “low culture” and uses its proclivity for technology and the future to muse about the social and political implications of a “perfect” (or imperfect) world—however it may be defined. But it is not, as Jameson suggests, the only home for utopian fiction.

Although capitalism and the postmodern condition (of non-reflexivity, as Jameson describes) combine to make for inhospitable territory for utopian thinking, the individual imagination can transcend any context, no matter how negative. To be the unaware subject of commodification is one thing; but simply being cognizant of one’s transformation to one-dimensionality is enough to inspire a struggle against it. To think knowledgeably about utopia, then, one must recognize the obstacles that make such thinking nearly impossible in the current context (be they political, social, or literary) and confront them, which presupposes a utopian hope in and of itself. The empowering effect of reflexivity in the contemporary context is precisely the point that Jameson’s writing often suggests but fails to elaborate every time.

## Overcoming a Tainted Past

Michèle C. Cone

Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: l'oubli du fascisme: trois intellectuels roumains dans la tourmente du siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002. Pp. 552.

Over the years, the list of intellectuals who collaborated with the Nazis and their allies has gotten longer. Celebrated philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Paul de Man, celebrated novelists like Alain Robbe-Grillet and, more recently, Günter Grass have been placed on that list. The latter two authors put themselves on that list by publishing their memoirs.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the misdeeds during the Nazi era ranged from carrying a Nazi party card and giving pro-Nazi lectures (Heidegger), to working in an armament factory in Nazi Germany (Robbe-Grillet), to joining the SS elite corps (Grass), to contributing tendentious articles in the pro-Nazi press (de Man). For every author named above, a defense mechanism was put in place by a famous author, be he or she a friend, a lover, or an admirer of the now-tainted figure. In the case of Grass, one of his supporters, John Irving, the author of *The World According to Garp*, was so appalled that anyone would dare call his friend “something of a big mouth and a fraud and also something of a hypocrite” that he turned the table on the accuser: “It is Grass’s craven critics—the famous [Christopher] Hitchens among them—who should feel ashamed.”<sup>2</sup>

In such a context, it is refreshing to find a book that does not exculpate its subjects: Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Eugene Ionesco, three well-known Romanian intellectuals who “collaborated” with a fascist regime close to the Nazis. In *Eliade, Cioran, Ionesco: l'oubli du fascisme*, Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine (henceforth abbreviated as Lavastine), a French philosopher and journalist at *Le Monde*, patiently reconstructs the careers of these three eminent figures using an astonishing breadth of archival materials. In the 1920s and 30s, she shows

1. Günter Grass, *Peeling The Onion* (2007) and Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Le miroir qui revient* (1984). While a number of young Frenchmen of Robbe-Grillet’s generation chose to join a Resistance network rather than go to work in Nazi Germany as required by the STO (Service de Travail Obligatoire), Robbe-Grillet, the loyal son of a Pétainist antisemitic family from Brittany, opted for work in Germany.

2. John Irving, “A Soldier Once,” *New York Times Book Review*, July 8, 2007.

Cioran and Eliade writing nationalist antisemitic texts in the right-wing press of their home country, and praising the leader of the Legionnaire Movement. All three of them, she discovers, held diplomatic posts in the regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu, the fascist leader of Romania. Eliade worked in the press and propaganda office of the Romanian embassy in Lisbon. Ionesco lucked into a similar post (cultural attaché) in Vichy in 1942, which he kept until the fall of Antonescu, in August 1944. Cioran spent only a few weeks in Vichy similarly employed, and then he moved to occupied Paris. After the war, these collaborators with a fascist regime, now pariahs in their own country, “made their way from precarity to celebrity” (384) in Paris. And this phase of their story, which Eliade called “the most fecund of his life,” is no less fascinating.

While Lavastine’s biography has been criticized in France for putting Ionesco in the company of two Romanian fascist intellectuals—Ionesco had Jewish origins on his French mother’s side and his early writings in *Non* repeatedly trashed Eliade’s political views<sup>3</sup>—his uncanny two-year stint at Vichy was worth airing for bringing out the kinds of compromises that a person fearing extermination was willing to make. Plus, the photograph of an amicable threesome on the cover of her book suggests that, in their mature years, the political enmities that had kept them apart in earlier times had subsided. On the other hand, it would be wrong to associate Ionesco’s politics with those of the other two. His stint in Vichy as cultural attaché was not particularly heroic, notes Lavastine, but the French intelligentsia with which he had contacts through literary reviews like *Poésie*, *Cahiers du Sud*, and *Confluences* were above reproach on the subject of collaboration with the Nazis (349–62).<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I will first review the evidence with which Lavastine makes her case against Cioran and Eliade, and show the Parisian networks that helped them to remake themselves as French authors in postwar Paris. I will then examine the process that the author calls “l’oubli du fascisme,” the *forgetting of fascism*, which helped the Romanians to emerge, and ask whether “the forgetting of fascism” in postwar Paris was a matter of ignorance, complicity, inattention to context, or a successful cover-up. While Lavastine’s book argues that a successful cover-up worked from the beginning of the three authors’ Paris days, and that it was facilitated by the Cold War that isolated Romania behind the Iron Curtain, I will introduce other factors that could have been relevant to the rise of Eliade and Cioran in postwar Paris. One was the complicity of a right-wing French milieu. Another was the rise in the 1950s of a critical apparatus that focused on the text, at the expense of biography, context, and history. Thus, what Lavastine names “the forgetting of fascism” turns out to be in part a conscious act of cover-up by

3. “A guide maybe, but on roads that lead nowhere” (72). All the translations from the French are my own.

4. It may well be in this context that Ionesco met Jean Paulhan.



the protagonist and in part a conscious or unconscious act of complicity by a supporting network.

### *I. Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran as Romanian Nationalists*

Cioran, Ionesco, and Eliade belonged to a generation of Romanian intellectuals born in the early 1900s. This “New Generation,” sometimes called the “Criterion Generation,” came of age in Bucharest at a time of extreme political turmoil, frustration, and disgust with the previous generation. In the late 1920s, the New Generation included a broad political spectrum of the local intelligentsia, such as Cioran and Eliade, on the right, and Ionesco and Mihail Sebastian, on the left (69).<sup>5</sup> Their shared mentor was a revered professor of philosophy at the University of Bucharest, Nae Ionescu (1890–1940).

From the start, Eliade, a brilliant and precocious intellectual, was the charismatic leader of the right wing of this New Generation, and his ideas on how to revive Romanian nationalism proved to be a magnet for young people increasingly frustrated by the political leadership in Romania. Eliade’s first political text, *Spiritual Itinerary*, dates from 1927. There was nothing original in Eliade’s right-wing program, notes Lavastine, save for its spiritual dimension and the fact that, because Romania had few if any victories on which to base a nationalist pride (it had lost half of its territory in recent times), a theoretician of Romanian nationalism had to look back to the rule of King Burebista of Dacia in 70 BC to find a worthy role model for the new Romania. Herodotus had apparently called the Dacians “the most just and the most courageous of Thracians” (81).

Not only did these just and courageous Dacians have roots in ancient Greece and points further East—Dacians were said to be descendants of the northern branch of Indo-Europeans—but they practiced the monotheist cult of Zalmoxis (81). Their profile, albeit fabricated for ideological purposes, had much to recommend them to local nationalists, particularly to Eliade, who believed in the spiritual/sacred dimension of nationalism. “Cosmic Christianity” was how Eliade, the future historian of religions, named the cult of Zalmoxis (82).<sup>6</sup> According to Lavastine, “from the 1920s on, Eliade is the spokesperson of this mystique.” And she adds: “Many years later, he would return to these theses in a text entitled *De Zalmoxis a Genghis-Khan* (Payot, 1970), only erasing the ideological terrain of their emergence” (82), i.e., the promotion of Romanians as a superior Aryan race. His early insights into long-neglected religions from the distant past and from distant places (he spent time in India and became fascinated with yoga)

5. Sebastian, a Jew, remained in Romania during World War II. His diaries published in French in 1999 are a key source of information on Romanian politics and personalities of his generation.

6. In 1938, *Zalmoxis* became an Eliade-inspired publication.

would indeed serve him well after World War II, as would his singular interest in alchemy, magic, early forms of religion, and other intuitive modes of experience.

To those who would dismiss the mystique propagated by a young Eliade (1907–86) and a young Cioran (1911–95) as an insignificant parenthesis, Lavastine offers no support (83). While their writings in *Cuvintul* were still student efforts to revolutionize the political system in Romania, Lavastine unearthed close to fifty articles by Eliade and almost as many by Cioran in the daily right-wing *Vremea* written between 1934 and 1938, “professing an extremist nationalism where one finds all the elements of Legionnaire ideology, including its ingredients of anti-semitism and xenophobia” (168). By then, the Legionnaire Movement had become a private army corps known as the Iron Guard, at the service of a self-proclaimed fascist leader named Corneliu Codreanu. These individuals were now a real threat to a highly unstable regime in Romania. Thus, giving support to the Legionnaire Movement and its leader in the press was more than endorsing an idea; it was endorsing its violent actions—the sacking of villages, the killing of thousands of Romanian Jews and ideological enemies. Coming from two well-known young polemicists, the texts they published could not help but carry weight.<sup>7</sup>

So exposed was Eliade’s pro-Legionnaire militantism that when the Legionnaire Movement was suppressed and its leader Codreanu arrested, accused of plotting against the state, Eliade too was arrested on July 14, 1938, and interned until his transfer to a sanatorium, followed by a military stint at Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. A Romanian compatriot and Jewish friend of Eliade’s, the writer Mihail Sebastian, offers the following report on Eliade’s views in September 1939 as the German army is invading Poland: “The resistance of the Poles in Warsaw is a Judaic resistance. Only the *youpins* are capable of using women and children for blackmail purposes [*pour faire du chantage*] by throwing them into the front lines—they are abusing German scruples. The Germans had better not destroy

7. It is in the pages of *Vremea* that Eliade exhorts young intellectuals to emerge from their ivory tower and participate in civilian strife by endorsing dictatorship and supporting the extremist and fascist Legionnaire Movement. It is there that he lavishes praise on Codreanu, the leader of the Legionnaire Movement, saying “Mr. Corneliu is so profoundly mystical that his success would mean the victory of the Christian spirit in Europe” (*Vremea*, February 21, 1937). It is in this publication that Lavastine uncovers the depths of his negative views on democracy and his pro-dictatorship stand: “Being a foreign import, a democratic regime takes care of things that are not specifically Romanian, such as the rights of men, the rights of minorities, freedom of conscience” (*Vremea*, December 18, 1936); “Dictatorship is always preferable to democracy even if it means that in some situations, certain personalities must suffer” (*Vremea*, March 28, 1937). Lavastine discovers in *Vremea* articles by Eliade such as “Why I Believe in The Victory of The Legionnaire Movement” (December 17, 1937), “The New Legionnaire Aristocracy” (January 23, 1938), and “The Provinces and the Legionnaire Movement” (February 13, 1938), and many others (chap. 4, 165–82).

anything in Romania. Our salvation can only come from a pro-German [foreign] policy.”<sup>8</sup>

It is thus hardly surprising that Britain at war with Germany did not much want Eliade around—after his brief stint at Cluj, he had obtained a position at the Romanian embassy in London—and that the future historian of religions fared better in Salazar’s Portugal, where he was named press and propaganda attaché at the Romanian embassy in Lisbon. He remained there during the entire period when Romania was on the side of Nazi Germany, producing an apologetic biography of the Portuguese fascist leader Salazar, and keeping a diary. Reading for the first time this immensely instructive private diary, Lavastine notes no change of heart toward the Legionnaire Movement and toward Nazi Germany, no word of sympathy concerning the Jews’ extermination in his country. The Allies’ landing in North Africa, the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad, the likely victory of the Anglo-Americans and of their communist ally, the Soviet Union, are all described as tragic developments (277). Never published in their uncensored form during his lifetime, those diaries, now in the archives of the University of Chicago, show strong evidence of Eliade’s unchanging private sentiments against Jews, against Communism, and for Nazi Germany.

Were it not for a more unstable personality, Cioran, another right-wing member of the New Generation in Romania, could pass for Eliade’s double, at least in his political views. The author in 1936 of *La transfiguration de la Roumanie*, a political treatise detailing his ideas on how to give Romania its historical hour, Cioran argued the need for Romania to rid itself of freedoms for all, to model itself after Nazi Germany, and to deal forcefully with the Jewish question (122). Also a contributor to *Vremea* in the 1930s, as well as a fervent admirer of the Legionnaire Movement, Cioran found at Vichy what Eliade had found in Lisbon: a diplomatic post sheltering him from war and from the change of leadership in his native country.

Unfortunately for Cioran, he did not do well at the Romanian embassy, and he was fired after a few weeks. Paris thereafter served as his base. That he had some kind of an epiphany at that time, perhaps catalyzed by what happened to his compatriot, the philosopher Benjamin Fondane, is Lavastine’s hypothesis. When Fondane was denounced and arrested as a Jew in March 1944, Cioran joined Jean Paulhan (a resistance figure and longtime editor of *Nouvelle Revue Française*)

8. The quote is from Sebastian’s *Journal 1935–1944*, p. 207 (cited on 200). For other statements on Jews by Eliade, see in the original Romanian “Judaism and Antisemitism” (*Vremea*, July 22, 1934), “Christianity Face-to-Face with Judaism” (*Vremea*, August 5, 1934), and “Blind Pilots” (*Vremea*, September 19, 1937). Though a few details on Eliade’s thinking, based on excerpts from Sebastian’s diaries, emerged in 1972 in the Israeli publication *Toladot*, and more information was uncovered by Italian scholars in 1977 and 1978, Eliade’s image did not seriously suffer.

in an effort to obtain his release, an incredibly rare feat. They succeeded, but Fondane said that he would not be freed without his sister, who was arrested at the same time. Both were taken away to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, leaving Cioran to rethink his admiration for the Nazis and his antisemitism.

## II. Forging New Identities in Paris

Paris was where Eliade and Cioran reconnected, first in November 1943, during Eliade's passage there. And it was from Paris that, soon after Eliade was dismissed from his Lisbon post, the two of them launched their second life and successful literary careers in the French language. Ionesco, also fired from his post at Vichy, returned to Paris. Not much is known about his relationship with the other two in these early postwar years when all three of them kept a low profile. In 1949, Eliade published a French version of his history of religions and, two years later, his *Mythe de l'éternel retour*. Also in 1949, Cioran published *Précis de décomposition* (*A Short History of Decay*) and received the Rivarol Prize for it. Ionesco's first play was performed in December 1949, followed by several more plays in the 1950s and 60s.

It is beyond the scope of this review to examine in detail the contents of these first texts in French by the three Romanians. Suffice it to say that each in his own way brought something new to the intellectual scene of Paris. Ionesco, took on the theatrical scene and turned it upside down to create what is now known as the "Theatre of the Absurd." Cioran in his *Short History of Decay* appropriated a seventeenth-century French tradition of aphorisms (La Rochefoucault and La Bruyère), but his aphorisms were far more nihilistic in their abject pessimism than those of his French counterparts. As for Eliade, his treatise on religions introduced structuralism to the study of cultures and myths, finding in all cultures and myths from past and present, from East and West, a shared sense of the sacred.<sup>9</sup> Detractors of Eliade's writings on religion see no contradiction between his political writings and the antisemitic subtext of his writings on religion.<sup>10</sup> The publishers of Cioran's and Eliade's first postwar texts were no less than the famous houses of Gallimard and Payot.

Lavastine does not hide the fact that hurdles stood in the paths of the protagonists after the war was over. There were plenty of Romanian émigrés in Paris who knew of their writings in *Vremea*, some of whom were former allies of the Legionnaire Movement, while others were like the poet Paul Celan, a Holocaust survivor who arrived in Paris after the war, having lost his entire family. The Romanian embassy in Paris was also aware of their political past and stood in their way

9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, also looking for universal structures of social groups, would find them in exogamy.

10. See Daniel Dubuisson, *Imposture et pseudo-science: l'oeuvre de Mircea Eliade* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2005).

on several occasions. A Romanian professor named Constantin Marinescu, who apparently knew of Eliade's political past, successfully opposed his candidacy for the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) (408).<sup>11</sup>

Despite these early defeats, Eliade and Cioran were able to remake themselves. Cioran distanced himself from his Romanian roots to the extent of no longer writing in Romanian and becoming a French-language author. Eliade separated himself from his past by publishing in the field of comparative religions. His only book known to the French public until then was on yoga. Eliade also worked on his memoirs, a mode favored by tainted personalities who need to justify their behavior by reconstructing their past.<sup>12</sup> In his case, Lavastine finds discrepancies, silences, and lies when she compares Eliade's published memoirs with his wartime private diary.

But Eliade and Cioran could not have achieved their goal of remaking themselves as French intellectuals without a supportive Parisian intellectual milieu. One wishes that Lavastine had examined more exhaustively the individuals who facilitated the entry of these authors into the publishing and university worlds, as well as their motivations. Our biographer does mention a number of names, but without explaining who they were. Her French readers are assumed to know them. The first French names that come up are those of individuals whom Cioran, a newcomer to Paris himself, introduced to Eliade during Eliade's Paris visit in November 1943, a time when France was still under the Nazi boot and when the official literary scenes were right-wing. Cited in Eliade's diary are Paul Morand, Jean Cocteau, and Georges Dumézil. Morand, a writer, was then Pétain's ambassador to Romania. Cocteau, the well-known poet and filmmaker, moved at ease in occupied Paris. In October 1943, his film *L'éternel retour* had just opened in Parisian cinemas to much acclaim, possibly inspiring Eliade's second book in French, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*. As for Dumézil, he was an established scholar of comparative religions whose books were published by Gallimard and Payot. Dumézil not only was going to get Eliade and Cioran published there, but was going to write the introduction to Eliade's treatise on religion, and invited Eliade to lecture at the *École des Hautes Études*, where he had been teaching since 1935.

After World War II, Eliade and Cioran maintained their contacts with the right and made new French contacts on both sides of the aisle. Among the supporters

11. In this case the backing of Georges Dumézil, Louis Renou, Paul Masson Oursel, Henry Charles Puech, Lucien Febvre, and Gabriel Le Bras did not suffice.

12. After the fall of the Pétain regime in France, officials in that regime used memoir-writing to explain themselves. Useful as they are, they need to be consulted with a certain amount of suspicion and skepticism. See Michèle C. Cone, *Artists Under Vichy: A Case of Prejudice and Persecution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), on Louis Hautecoeur's memoirs.

of Eliade figured Georges Bataille, Lucien Febvre,<sup>13</sup> and Brice Parain.<sup>14</sup> A minor academic named Alphonse Dupront was Cioran's greatest benefactor, recommending him for fellowships that were key to the expatriate's survival. Cioran found support in the pages of *Combat*, where the historian of surrealism Maurice Nadeau praised him as a "new prophet of concentrationary times" (401). He was also published by Gallimard. As for Ionesco, it would appear that early on Jean Paulhan became a supporter of his plays.<sup>15</sup>

Thanks to Professor Jean Wahl, one of several Jews with whom Eliade had friendly relations over the years, Eliade gave a course at the Collège de Philosophie in 1950 (411).<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Henry Corbin, another historian of religions—whom Eliade probably met in Switzerland at Ascona, the town where meetings of the renowned spiritualist group the Eranos Circle took place regularly—Eliade got a three-year fellowship from the American Bollingen Foundation in 1951. In 1955, Eliade attended the International Congress of the History of Religions in Rome. This time Eliade found an American supporter in the person of Professor Joachim Wach, head of Religious Studies at the University of Chicago, who invited him to give the Haskell lectures there. Wach's sudden death opened the door to Eliade and to his career as a professor of comparative religions. With successes in Paris for all three of them, and success at the University of Chicago for Eliade, the former cultural attaché at Vichy and the two former admirers of the Legionnaire Movement had remade themselves and, according to Lavastine, neatly obliterated their tainted past.

### ***III. The Forgetting of Fascism: Cover-up, Complicity, Indifference to Context***

The French intellectuals who helped these three Romanians reach success in Paris in the late 1940s make for an impressive list. What motivated these French sponsors is difficult to reconstruct now, and it was probably different in each case. For Lavastine, the Romanian intellectuals, having successfully concealed the

13. Georges Bataille invites Eliade to contribute to *Critique* in 1948, and Lucien Febvre gives him a chance to write for *Les Annales* (406).

14. Florin Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade: le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: Découverte, 2003), pp. 356–57, mentions Brice Parain.

15. Ionesco, who succeeded Paulhan at the Académie Française, delivered the eulogy of his predecessor. In this text, he recalls the evening in February 1951 when Paulhan, accompanied by a large contingent of his friends, attended his play at the Théâtre de Poche, and how delighted its author was when, watching from the wings, he saw Paulhan laughing (*Discours de réception de M. Eugène Ionesco*, Paris, Palais de l'Institut, February 25, 1971).

16. Eliade was befriended by Saul Bellow during the University of Chicago phase of Eliade's life. Eliade is a character in Bellow's novel *Ravenstein*. Gershom Scholem, the Israeli scholar, also became a friend of Eliade after the war. Then there was Mihail Sebastian, his Romanian compatriot.

tainted aspects of their past with lies and half-truths, were ready to be discovered in a postwar Paris in intellectual disarray. Agile at networking, Eliade and Cioran simply met their French counterparts informally—at a left bank café, at a posh dinner party, at a popular post-lecture event—and charmed their interlocutors. To the question of what if anything beyond the quality of their writings gave the Romanians powerful allies in the publishing and academic world, Lavastine would answer “the forgetting of fascism,” a well-managed cover-up.

Since the publication of Lavastine’s book in 2002, information has emerged that suggests that a total cover-up on Eliade’s past may not have been necessary, at least vis-à-vis Dumézil, his major protector. In a text published in 2003, *Mircea Eliade: le prisonnier de l’histoire*, Florin Turcanu offers several hypotheses on Dumézil’s motives for launching Eliade’s Parisian career. Of course, “intellectual esteem no doubt accounts for much . . . of the support that Dumézil brings to Eliade between 1945 and 1950,” though Eliade would distance himself from the approach of his protector. The two historians of religions apparently read each other’s manuscripts and offered their observations to one another in preparation for the 1949 publication in French of Eliade’s *Traité d’histoire des religions*, with an introduction by Dumézil, and for Dumézil’s second edition of *Mitra-Varuna*, edited by Eliade two years later.<sup>17</sup>

But complicity between the two of them extended beyond intellectual understanding, according to the same source. Like Eliade, suffering calumny and political accusations from the new Romanian government, Dumézil had also seen his career threatened by politics after the Liberation. And although no one knows how much Dumézil knew of Eliade’s fascist engagement, “if Eliade presented himself as merely a man from the right, it would have been enough to create between them a sort of complicity,” writes Eliade’s biographer. Dumézil had been close to Maurras and the Action Française in the mid-1920s. He had dedicated his thesis to a right-wing historian, Pierre Gaxotte. As for the anti-Sovietism of Eliade, it would not have much troubled Dumézil, according to the same source.<sup>18</sup> It appears that Dumézil’s engagement on the far right continued into the 1970s, as his name appears in Pierre Andre Taguieff’s *Sur la nouvelle droite*, where Dumézil is called a key figure in the reshaping of the French New Right and the thinking of its leader, Alain de Benoist, in the 1970s.<sup>19</sup>

17. Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade*, pp. 351–53.

18. Ibid. Two interviews with Dumézil by Didier Eribon, *Faut-il brûler Dumézil* and *Entretiens avec Didier Eribon*, are cited by Turcanu without a reference.

19. See Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *Sur la nouvelle droite* (Paris: Descartes, 1994), p. 174: “It is the discovery of Georges Dumézil’s oeuvre that enabled the *Nouvelle Ecole* to recast the ‘occidental’ doctrine—that of a European ‘nationalism’—into the directional idea of a common Indo-European origin or ‘Indo-European heritage,’ guaranteeing the unity and specificity of a mentality.”



This information concerning Dumézil should not be brushed off easily. If there was on the part of Dumézil a strong dose of empathy for a brilliant and no doubt engaging individual whose field of research amplified his own, and whose ideas were compellingly fresh and quotable, there was also between them a political complicity. Both had experienced a sudden shift from celebrity to underdog status due to “regime change”; and, more importantly, at a time when Sartrean left-wing pro-Communist intellectuals held the fort, both Dumézil and Eliade stood as bulwarks against left-wing ideology in the publishing world. Thus, in this particular case and at that particular time, Dumézil had found an accomplice in Eliade. With his access to the publishing house of Gallimard and Payot apparently unfettered, the French historian was eager to promote a political and intellectual ally, knowing or not knowing that in Romania Eliade would have gone on trial and possibly met the same fate, a death sentence, as the French pro-Nazi collaborator Robert Brasillach. That the right-wing literary world that had ruled during the Vichy era needed to regroup and recruit new talent is not a negligible factor in the rise of Cioran and especially of Eliade in the immediate postwar years.

Around 1952, when Central Europe was isolated behind the Iron Curtain, a new context was put in place and a blackout on Cioran’s and Eliade’s pasts was no doubt facilitated. From then on, as Lavastine rightly points out, concrete evidence of the Romanians’ fascist writings became hidden from view in some poorly maintained Communist archive to which no westerner had access until the 1990s. During that period, and under these circumstances, even an unrepentant fascist like Eliade could remake himself into an anti-Communist without changing much of his pro-fascist views. This new Eliade emerges in a passage from Tony Judt’s text *Past Imperfect* (1992), quoting Eliade along with Czesław Miłosz and Milan Kundera on the thoughts of East European intellectuals in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup>

The geographical blackout that began in 1952 enabled intellectuals like Eliade to be quoted and referenced in good faith, but other factors made it possible for personalities tainted by their past to disguise themselves in Paris. For the 1950s also marked the entry of structuralism and semiology as tools of textual interpretation, at the expense of contextual references, such as biography, history,

20. In order to demonstrate “the sense of injury, of pained surprise at Western Europe’s blissful indifference to the fate of its eastern neighbors,” Tony Judt quotes Eliade writing in *Preuve* (April 14, 1952): “Does Europe not realize . . . that she has been amputated of her very flesh? For . . . all these countries [now behind the Iron Curtain] are in Europe, belong to the European community.” So intent is Judt to make a point on the indifference of Western Europe to its eastern neighbors in the postwar years that he does not suspect that when Eliade pleads for a reunited Europe, it is probably not a democratic model of a united Europe that Eliade has in mind. Note the visceral language of Eliade—“amputated of her very flesh”—which reeks of fascist violence.

and politics.<sup>21</sup> In retrospect, it is easy to see that, consciously or unconsciously, this intellectual strategy was complicitous with silence on blemished histories, including the pasts of Eliade and Cioran, and to a lesser degree Ionesco.

Overall, Lavastine has performed a brilliant task in lifting a veil on the type of fascist antisemitic writing produced by Eliade and Cioran, which helped to demolish a fledgling democracy in Central Europe and replace it with a pro-Nazi government. She also should be commended for revealing the positive French reception accorded to these right-wing intellectuals at a time when right-wing power in French literary milieux had allegedly been extinguished by *Epuration* tribunals, and when the left was said to dominate intellectual life. Such a discovery puts into question the complaint, expressed by collabo writers like Maurice Bardèche, that after the war in Paris, “literary history was being rewritten to focus on the writers who had been in the Resistance, writers grouped around Sartre and Camus, and that the rest were thought better off forgotten.”<sup>22</sup>

Lavastine could have explored in more detail the context in which Eliade and Cioran operated in Paris, and in particular whether the friends of these fascist authors were sympathetic or indifferent to the political views of their protégés, or truly ignorant of their political backgrounds, and whether the individuals who promoted them and quoted their ideas would have acted differently if they had known more about their collaboration with fascism and Nazism. Yet these questions take on a renewed relevance in light of Günter Grass’s recent revelations, the latest in a series of instances when friends come to discover that someone they admired had manipulated them and lied to them.<sup>23</sup> History shows that allies of tainted personalities rarely change their views. Some hesitate to assert their moral superiority. Others tend to separate the work from the author, and, overall, mutual admiration or its simulacrum takes precedence over misguided ideology.

21. Even Susan Sontag, a sympathetic reader of Roland Barthes, the leading proponent of a semiological approach, remarks in her introduction to *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. xxii: “Barthes is in an evasive relation to politics, and he is one of the great modern refusers of history. Barthes started publishing and maturing in the aftermath of World War II, which, astonishingly, he never mentions; indeed, in all his writings he never, as far as I recall, mentions the word ‘war’.”

22. This sentence is the bait offered by Alice Kaplan to Maurice Bardèche in her interview with him at the end of her *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 178. He takes the bait by saying “yes, that’s it exactly,” naming Paul Morand as a writer “who suffered horribly,” and Henry de Montherlant, Marcel Aymé, and Jean Anouilh as among the “foremost banned writers in 1945.”

23. These include Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, not to forget the many admirers of Céline.