

Contemporary Perspectives
in Critical and Social Philosophy

Social and Critical Theory

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VOLUME 2

Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy

edited by

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Jan Bryant, John Hewitt & Jeremy Smith



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Issues and Debates in Contemporary Critical and Social Philosophy

I. Modernities, Recognition and Subjectivities

Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy brings together a range of perspectives concerning ways of conceptualising and thinking about the modern constellation. These perspectives concern the way in which the subject has been conceptualised, and in relation to this debates and disputes concerning its constitution, including its relation with others. Each of these concerns is also informed by the historicity or historical self-consciousness of modernity. Moreover, because each of the essays published here involves the historical self-consciousness of modernity, each invokes a dialogue of the present with its pasts in terms of memories, recoveries and interpretations. Each essay combines a longer historical view of past interpretations with the articulation of ongoing and contemporary concerns. This combination of present concerns with the horizons of the past includes the recovery of the long, deep and often poorly understood history of the Romantic current

of modernity, especially its early German version, a history with which the essays by Karl Ameriks, Manfred Frank, Daniel Hoolsema, Andrew Bowie and Christoph Menke are centrally concerned.

The range of different approaches to the modern constellation presented in this volume also highlights other recent developments within German critical and social philosophy and includes essays by Martin Seel and Max Pensky, and critical discussions of the works not only of Manfred Frank, but also Theodor Adorno and Axel Honneth. Moreover, these recent developments open onto dialogues and exchanges within and across the traditions and bodies of work upon which these writers draw. These critical exchanges have occurred around the traditions of hermeneutics, post-structuralism, and Critical Theory, as well as with other traditions including the Budapest School represented in this volume by Agnes Heller and Maria Márkus.

To be sure, there are many disagreements between these writers and among their interlocutors in this current collection of essays—disagreements that will be explored below. Nonetheless, if, even momentarily, a single aspect unites them and the philosophical and socio-theoretical traditions with which these writers work, it is an unease and even alarm concerning the instrumentalising version of the modern world, so tellingly portrayed in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer, and reconstructed here in the essays by Martin Seel and Max Pensky. Whether this unease is couched in terms of the ‘the social pathologies of modernity’ (Honneth), ‘the hermeneutical emergency of the subject’ (Frank), or ‘of homelessness and loss of meaning’ (Heller), there is a continuing concern that these instrumentalising actions—and the reduction of the subject to nature, a system, a text, a language—will not only continue unabated but also transform the self-understanding of what it means to be human.¹

However, and as will become clear in the critical exchanges with the works of Manfred Frank, Theodor Adorno, Axel Honneth, and Agnes Heller in this volume, these writers and their traditions part company and enter into deep disagreements concerning their own responses to this particular modern landscape. For Honneth and Heller the responses are driven by politically motivated critiques that attempt to re-work the legacy of practical reason. For each of these figures modernity remains a *political* problem, which is addressed

in terms of political form and ethical actions. For Frank, and the long Romantic heritage with which he engages, as well as Adorno, an aesthetically charged response opens onto the unique and creative dimensions of humanity that are either ignored, or suppressed, or written out by instrumentalist accounts. Moreover, each of these different responses is grounded in competing paradigms. For Heller and Honneth, the political responses to the instrumentalising dimension of modernity are invoked through an intersubjective paradigm, whilst for Frank and Adorno the aesthetic response opens onto a reconstruction of the paradigm of the subject.

Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the differences of approach that occur in the works of Frank, Honneth and Heller, and by implication Adorno, there is also an affinity between them in the light of their critiques not only of instrumentalist rationalism, but also of rationalism *per se*. This is especially the case with regard to the more recent procedural rationalism of Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, whose work forms the background against which many of the critical dialogues in this volume are made. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this introductory essay to do more than point to their own critiques of Habermas, each in their own way criticises his reliance on the propositional use of language as the quasi-transcendental ground of a universal pragmatics.² Each in their own way, points to pre- or non-linguistic and affective dimensions of human action that already and always are invoked in any pattern of action. Frank invokes the notion of inner self-conscious awareness or *selbstgefühl*, which has some affinities with Heller's own philosophical anthropology of feelings and needs, whilst Honneth emphasises the pre-cognitive and affectively articulated struggles for recognition.³

These essays, then, should be read both as presentations of the positions of each of these writers and the traditions in which they work, and as contributions to ongoing debates between those who may be viewed as protagonists, but from the perspective of greater distance share some striking 'elective affinities'.

II. Recovering German Romanticism: The Aesthetics of *Selbstgefühl* and the Modernity of Tragedy

One of the enduring legacies and practices of modernity, apart from its instrumentalising version, is another current expressed as aesthetic self-creation,

which Charles Taylor has termed, following Herder, the expressivist tradition.⁴ One of the major figures who has attempted to recover this expressivist tradition beyond its articulation in the works of Herder is Manfred Frank. His work opens onto the uniqueness of the subject—a topic and pre-occupation central to early Romanticism in particular. For Manfred Frank, the philosophy of the subject, in which the issue of aesthetic self-creation is usually couched, is neither an outdated nor a dead issue.⁵ He not only critiques the intersubjectivist turn in contemporary critical and social philosophy, but also posits an irreducibility of subjectivity to context. His particular notion of the subject signals both his debt to the early Romantic tradition in German philosophy and his ongoing recovery of its contours against the backdrop of Kant's own program and its legacy in German Idealism.

The transcendental program laid down by Kant provided a problematic model for the nature of subjectivity, a model that entailed that the subject was both the synthesiser of knowledge concerning nature and society, and was the source of this synthetic activity through the faculty of reason. Reason entailed that judgements could be made from within the subject's own resources. Notwithstanding the anthropological revolution entailed in Kant's transcendental program, it, nonetheless, presupposes a capacity for the subject to reflect upon the condition of the formation of knowledge without knowing the nature of this capacity—a charge that, for example both Fichte and Hegel made against him. In other words, the transcendental capacity to generate a reflection and form a synthesis entailed that the subject could be both subject and object simultaneously. The objectivating capacity was due to the faculty of reason, whilst the substance of the subjective was left un-addressed, or was sublated to the capacity of transcendental thinking. Nonetheless, Kant recognised that whilst this thinking is limited to the way in which it synthesised intuitions, he had to assume the existence of a 'something' in addition to a deontological capacity. In other words, for thinking—or more generally, consciousness—to be operable something in addition must be pre-supposed. This pre-supposition is the starting point of much of Manfred Frank's work, and is formulated as a familiarity or self-consciousness that must be present for the subject prior to its cognitive activity.

Karl Ameriks, in "The Key Role of *Selbstgefühl* in Philosophy's Aesthetic and Historical Turns," argues that Manfred Frank draws on three paths that devel-

oped as responses to Kant's program—an anthropological one, an aesthetic one, and a historical one. In Frank's hands all of these paths are recovered through immanent reconstructions of Romanticism. For Frank, the recovery of the Romantic legacy is vital for a reconsideration of the philosophy of the subject in contemporary critical and social philosophy, especially if Romanticism is seen as a broader and deeper legacy than one identified narrowly with sentimentality, or the sublime and the restless.

The anthropological direction is better known for the one that emanates from Feuerbach and Marx, and which is articulated in an idea of self-production through labour. For Frank, though, another equally important and yet lesser known anthropological direction stems from the early Romantic period, especially in the works of Novalis, Hölderlin, Isaak von Sinclair, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and Friedrich Schlegel, which is articulated in terms of the notion of *'selbstgefühl.'* *'Selbstgefühl'* has a double meaning that refers to a type of psychologically or innerly heightened self-awareness that is simultaneously moral and aesthetic. As Ameriks notes, "it offers an immediate revelation of both the self and existence (actuality, being) as such, and thus provides an intimate form of certainty found nowhere else" (p. 30 below). In this sense it is a spontaneous activity that is neither derived from nor reduced to an act of reflective, synthetic reasoning, nor to pure imaginative chaos.

Aesthetics became the paradigm that indicated what the intensity of self-awareness meant and how it was to be conveyed. In this aesthetic sense, self-awareness means being given over to a state of feeling, which is expressed and elaborated as personal and authentic style in the form of aphorisms, fancy, the novel, and especially poetry. Daniel Hoolsema also points to this key feature in his "Manfred Frank, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy Prolegomena to a French-German Dialogue." Aesthetics is not simply as a matter of adornment. Rather, as a combination of feeling and personal style it is the most powerful form through which one can demonstrate one's own self-consciousness as one that exists in a combination of a pre-existent world (time), and a free movement within it that creates new and limitless possibilities. For Frank, style is the privileged form that indicates the subject's capacity to both establish the distance from historical context and articulate its singular, ineluctable, and non-recursive individuality of personal creativity, which dissolves this context and creates a new meaning and determination.⁶

Andrew Bowie draws out this aspect of Frank's work in his own study of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. By implicitly drawing on Frank's notion of *Selbstgefühl* he also brings Romanticism in contact with the modern post-metaphysical condition, and in so doing points to both a different and earlier version of the linguistic turn to the one developed by Habermas.

In his "Schleiermacher and Postmetaphysical Thinking" Bowie argues that determinations of meaning imply both a context dependency in the form of being located in a linguistic community, and being an active participant in it. In this way, the postmetaphysical problem of meaning refers to the recognition in contemporary philosophy of the contingency of systems of nature and society, the historicity and hence relativisation of world disclosures, both of which imply that the formation of meaning emerges from an interaction with these environments, and by implication with other systems of meaning or other interpretations. The contingency of each ruptures the long held assumption of the possible unity between subject and object. Habermas, for one, whilst accepting this post-metaphysical condition, has nonetheless attempted to provide stability to the contingency of meaning by arguing that it can be validated by referring to a truth content that is propositionally held. In the context of critical responses to Habermas' 'linguistic turn', Bowie argues that Schleiermacher's work is an earlier attempt to develop a postmetaphysical form of thinking about the formation of meaning that, although post-representational, does not attempt to stabilise it.

According to Bowie's interpretation, Schleiermacher's work should be read in a more dynamic way than has often been the case with his hermeneutics. Rather, for Bowie, Schleiermacher accepts and works with the image of post-metaphysical contingency on both sides—from the side of context, and from the side of the interpreter. However, it is more than this. Rather, there is an incommensurability and inaccessibility to meaning on both sides, that is, from the vantage point of context, and from the vantage point of the interpreter and his or her own individual style, in Frank's meaning of the term. Nonetheless, as Bowie argues, this incommensurability does not result in incoherence, but rather an incompleteness of meaning and its formation. For Bowie, music, rather than language, should be the more appropriate paradigm for the formation and expression of meaning, for in musical expression 'world disclosure' entails the free combination of pre-existing forms. In other words,

the interpreter does not simply *render* a pre-existing form but gives it an immediacy as a self-conscious active interaction and improvisation of it.

As Bowie indicates even in this broader post-metaphysical context of hermeneutically informed meaning creation, the subject constitutes meaning in a way that although dependent on an intersubjectively recognised context is irreducible to it. It is this dimension of irreducibility that returns us once again to the work of Manfred Frank, and more centrally to his essay published in this volume. Originally published as the Appendix to his *Selbstbewußtseinstheorien von Fichte bis Sartre*, “Fragments of a History of the Theory of Self-Consciousness from Kant to Sartre,” opens onto the way in which Frank investigates the subject from the perspective of a philosophical anthropology of non-reflective indeterminacy.⁷ However, a renewed interest and concern with the philosophy of the subject need not signal a return to its metaphysical articulation in terms reminiscent of traditional philosophy since Plato, or in a manner given to it in Heidegger’s later work. Rather, recent developments in German social and critical philosophy have re-opened the recovery of the philosophy of the subject in ways that are both non-identitarian and post-metaphysical, the most significant of which are the works of both Manfred Frank and Dieter Henrich.

Frank’s anthropological image of an experience of self-awareness and individual style functions as the basis for his critique of the reflection model of the subject. According to Frank in his “Fragments of a History of the Theory of Self-Consciousness from Kant to Kierkegaard” (I-VIII of the above-mentioned text published here) the idea of self-consciousness has been articulated in terms of a search for a guarantee of ultimate certainty in the form of an epistemic self-orientation and unity that makes possible a model of reflexivity from Descartes, Leibniz and Kant.⁸ However the reflection model of self-consciousness cannot explain the fact that subject and object are identical, nor can it explain self-awareness. Rather, in contrast to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, early Romantic thought, especially in the works of Hölderlin, Novalis, Sinclair, and Herbart, articulate another model in which one can speak about the primacy of a non-reflexive feeling state that exists prior to consciousness. This is also central—as Bowie argues—to the work of the later Romantic thinker, Schleiermacher, as it is to one of Romanticism’s most vehement critics, Kierkegaard. In this context, and as Frank has recommended

elsewhere a sharp distinction should be made between Idealism and German Romanticism. As Frank states:

I define Idealism as the conviction—made especially binding by Hegel—that consciousness is a self-sufficient phenomenon that, by virtue of its own means, can make comprehensible for itself even the prerequisites of its own existence. In contrast, what distinguishes early German Romanticism is the conviction that the very possibility of being a self is due to a transcendental ground that cannot be reduced to the immanence of consciousness. In this way the ground of being a self becomes a mystery that can never be revealed.⁹

Furthermore, and in the light of the historical self-consciousness of the modern period, Frank's reconstruction of the model of the subject as *selbstgefühl* is not simply genealogical. Rather, it is a depth hermeneutics that serves a double purpose of recovery and repositioning of arguments about the modern subject. As he points out in *What is Neo-Structuralism?*, the problem of understanding the nature of modern subjectivity, as well as defending it against versions that reduce it to a naturalistically conceived substrate of either nature or system, which has the effect of annihilating it, is itself a historical task. When we talk about 'the subject' we talk about the development of the idea of the modern subject, which itself is not one-dimensionally conceived on the basis of a reflexive—and by implication, instrumentalist—model. In other words, a hermeneutically driven investigation of the idea of the subject is a project that concerns the recovery and continuity of our historicity.

It is at this precise point, too, that for Daniel Hoolsema, there is a possible dialogue between Manfred Frank and Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in the light of the former's *What is Neo-Structuralism?* and the latter's *The Literary Absolute*. Both acknowledge the key role of not only Novalis, but also of Friedrich Schlegel in the development and articulation of the aesthetic counter-paradigm. For Hoolsema, though, what is troublesome is the way in which Frank privileges the idea of the possibility of infinitely new determinations, which themselves may not be subject to limitation, especially with regard to their effects on others. By proposing a philosophy of style with its image of timelessness or the infinite as the basis for a notion of free determination, Hoolsema argues that Frank is in danger of dropping the subject out of the hermeneutical circle altogether.

For him, the ontologically conceptualised notion of freedom that Jean-Luc Nancy proposes in *The Experience of Freedom*, as one into which one is thrown, can act as a corrective to Frank's position. From this perspective, the ontologically conceived finite and worldly experience of freedom is already a precondition for the subject to freely create the infinite array of new determinations. In addition Hoolsema also points to the work of Friedrich Schlegel who articulates an additional dimension of *selbstgefühl*—the possibility of self-limitation as an inner and necessary dimension of free expressiveness amongst others.

The conditions of free expression and self-limitation amongst others are ones that explores the full depth, range, and tempo of humanity and its dramas. The extent of this depth and tempo occurs not only, for example, and as Frank mentions, in the experience of love, whereby "each can be for itself, but neither can be without the other,"¹⁰ which is often viewed as Romanticism's paradigm of sociability, experience and authentic conduct, but also in one of love's possible outcomes, tragedy. Christoph Menke, in his "The Presence of Tragedy," like Frank, looks anew at the Romantic tradition in order to question the long-held conventional wisdom that modernity is a post-tragic age in which tragedy, as well as love, has been reduced to mere farce.¹¹

To be sure, as he points out, this conventional wisdom has been part of Romanticism's own self-understanding, especially because it developed this notion of post-tragedy from a teleological perspective that could only posit the *end* of tragedy. Menke argues that for Hegel and Nietzsche, whom he views as representative interpreters of this view, classical tragedy refers to the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, which in modernity are separated from one another, the result of which is tragedy's demise. Either its ethical dimension is dissolved into playful transgression and tragedy becomes comedy (Nietzsche), or its aesthetic dimension is sublated by reason's self-consciousness and a different ethical community emerges that serves the purpose of *Geist* (Hegel).

However, Menke points out that these interpretations of the end of tragedy can be subjected to immanent critique. In a re-reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Nietzsche's *Gay Science* in particular, Menke argues that tragedy in modernity is not a movement towards an *end*, but a movement *between* its ethical and aesthetic dimensions. In other words, tragedy is a term for the agonal or conflictual space between ethical and aesthetic experience (or style

in Frank's terms), in which the full force of being caught in an irresolvable situation is disclosed. In Menke's interpretation tragedy is re-positioned from being viewed as a condition that is produced by the conflict between an ethical order and an aesthetic experience that is resolved, to one that is produced by the permanent and irresolvable conflict between them. Moreover, and as importantly, modern tragedy is the condition of recognition that the tragic moment is the result of a self-production. In this way, there is an anthropological turn here that belongs to modernity. Classical tragedy has a mythic quality in which the natural order of things is disturbed. The condition of modernity is one in which the tragedies that are produced belong to it alone, and it is with this sense of recognition that an ironic reflection is also produced, which Menke terms modern ironic tragedy. In this context, modern ironic or reflexive tragedies are never resolved or made into something different or new; they can only ever be disclosed. Like Beckett's *Endgame* there are no exit signs.

III. The Politics of the Finite: Recognition and 'Ethical Turns' in Critical Theory

Christoph Menke's critique of the idea of post-tragedy is an explicit critique of the teleological versions of history that attempted to look for developmental laws in the formation of modern societies, and in so doing both reconstruct and theorise its evolution and growth. One version viewed this developmental history as progressive in that it moved from unfreedom to freedom, as we have seen with Hegel's analysis of tragedy. Alternatively, this teleological narrative has been constructed negatively in that world history is depicted as moving from progress to decline, either in terms of moral decline, or in terms of its propensity for rationalistically driven self-destruction.¹² However, a modernity with neither exits nor a pre-determined course does not entail that its routes are straight well lit boulevards and malls—the avenues of predictability. There are also alleyways, backstreets, camps, gulags, and alternative routes to unknown destinations. In other words, there are different modernities, and not all of them straightforward paths towards freedom or decline.

Max Pensky, in his "Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno," and Martin Seel in "Adorno's Contemplative Ethics," both in their

own ways give a different hue to the work of Theodor Adorno compared to those interpretations that emphasise the totalising negative history of occidental rationalism from Antiquity to the Enlightenment. Rather, in Pensky's view Adorno does not propose a negative teleology of modernity, nor does he wish to solve its problem, but rather to elucidate its riddle through moments of self-disclosing shock. For Pensky, the interpretative key to understanding Adorno's work is his notion of natural history which encompasses the multidimensionality of a project of critique and its critical anthropology. For Pensky, Adorno's notion of natural history encompasses the project of negative dialectics, which views the natural history of modernity as boulevards of reification, upon which one feels a sense of dread. However, this sense of dread is not telescoped into a negative totality. Rather, Pensky argues that Adorno turns the concept of natural history back against itself in the demand for a non-systematic philosophy embracing the principle of fragments that contain a sense of loss and sadness. This sense of loss and sadness can be, in addition to Benjamin's work, retrospectively and transciently recalled as a contingency that cannot be incorporated into a new conceptual or practical unity. In this context, the sense of sadness and loss does not concern a tangible 'thing' or 'event'. The boulevards do not collapse beneath one's feet, nor do they carry and transmit the stock of accumulated cultural knowledge that can be learned and drawn on. Rather, they carry the possibility of both *forgetting*—modernity's natural predisposition—and *remembering* this loss. Pensky argues that this remembrance is, for Adorno, an ethical act of critical-memorial disclosure: a moral theory in fragments. Sadness and loss refer to the fear of forgetting to remember suffering in the face of the petrification of culture and its meaninglessness. In Pensky's interpretation, Adorno's critical theory becomes a theory of critical memory that resists the effacement of suffering.

In this context, Adorno's critique is one with neither resignation nor redemption. Adorno had given up the recognised shortcomings and limits of a totalistically motivated redemptive paradigm, so beloved by Lukács and Benjamin. However, it is not without hope and the possibility of another kind of practice. According to Seel in his "Adorno's Contemplative Ethics," the shock of the disclosure of suffering is motivated not only by a sense of memory crisis, but also from a continuing memory of Kant's version of practical reason. In a similar interpretative vein to Pensky's, Adorno's work, for Seel, is also

infused with an ethics. Seel terms Adorno's ethics an ethics of contemplation, which carries a very precise meaning in that, and notwithstanding his critique of Kant, leans on the very Kantian notion of freedom as referring to 'purposiveness without purpose' and 'not treating another as mere means'. This notion of practical freedom is in contrast to the more predominant and equally modern freedom of the fixation upon things, purposes and techniques. In the context of the administration of fixation and the fixation of administration, contemplation does *not* mean the development of another specialised cognitive attitude, tied to its own particular sphere that reproduces the cold and distanced attitude between subject and thing, or subject and subject. In this sense, Seel draws on Adorno's version of freedom as an implicit critique of both the formal proceduralism of discourse ethics, which for Adorno would be another version of a cold and distanced exchange between subject and subject, and theories of recognition that only emphasise reciprocity, obligation and exchange.

Rather, Adorno's contemplative ethics is the name for both a space and a practice. It is a space in which something different apart from administrative-functional control can occur such as surprise and disappointment, freedom rather than happiness. And here freedom means a practice by which one is open to the other, and yet at the same time can let the other be, in any space whatsoever—in politics, work, leisure. In this sense purposiveness without purpose is not simply an aesthetic disposition derived from Kant's notion of the beautiful. It is also an acceptance of the manifold nature of the human condition that can be expressed through many differences without interference, reciprocity or exchange.

It is at precisely this juncture that a debate has emerged within contemporary critical theory between those for whom the critique of modernity and the ethics that motivate it should be located outside the formal and informal parameters of intersubjectivity, signified for example by the work of Frank, and those who locate this critique within it, as is the case in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Heller. In this context, however, there is a dispute between Habermas, Honneth and Heller concerning how the parameters of intersubjectivity might be theorised.

For Habermas, for example, this intersubjectivity is linguistically structured in a quasi-transcendental way. The pragmatic dimension of speech acts between

interlocutors also entails that, for Habermas, the norms that are implicit within any intersubjective exchange can be made explicit through argumentation.¹³ For Honneth, it is not language *per se* that is the constitutive dimension of intersubjectivity, but rather the *struggle* for recognition. Situations requiring discursive argumentation tend to arise when, through conflict and crisis, social and political agents challenge an established background consensus from a particular point of view. Claims that address dilemmas in social life arise not at the abstract level of universalisation but at the concrete level of conflict and resolution. For Honneth, without the experience of suffering and vulnerability caused by the internal interdependence of individualisation and recognition, there would be no explanation as to why individuals would have the inclination to develop or appeal to moral claims in the first place. Honneth suggests, therefore, that the existence and expansion of morality is dependent upon the struggles through which subjects bring about the recognition of their gradually developing claims to identity.

In order to emphasise the motivational perspective of claims for recognition, Honneth frames the structural relations necessary for recognition in terms of negative experiences of injustice as the basis upon which to construct his normative theory.¹⁴ He brings what might be considered a 'negative moral psychology' to the project of social critique by situating the critical perception of injustice more generally within individuals' negative experiences of having their 'moral' expectations violated or disappointed, resulting in feelings of disrespect.¹⁵ By way of this negative formulation, and in a manner reminiscent of first generation Critical Theory, Honneth argues, that one can locate a pretheoretical point of reference for normative critique within social reality. It is only such negative experiences of disrespect that can form the motivating force for social struggles and hence for counterfactually securing the normative ideals of human dignity and integrity.

In recognising the necessity to designate a variety of degrees of psychological injury that a subject might incur, Honneth attempts to set up a systematic distinction between three forms of 'disrespect.' The first form of degradation involves violations to a person's physical integrity, such as torture and rape; the second form concerns an individual's normative understanding of self that has the potential of being damaged by structural exclusion from the possession of certain rights within a given society; the final type of damaging

disrespect involves the debasement of collective lifestyles and shared values within which the particular worth of individual members is secured.¹⁶

In outlining experiences of disrespect, which may cause the identity of a person to collapse, Honneth has subsequently sought to develop a systematic theory of corresponding positive recognition relations. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth draws on the early work of Hegel in order to reconstruct three forms of recognition which he argues are necessary for the individual to flourish. These relations—love, rights, and solidarity—each contain a potential motivation for social conflict and can only be secured by well-established ‘ethical’ relations. The three patterns of intersubjective recognition are intended to specify the moral infrastructures that are necessary if a society is to minimise experiences of personal injury and disrespect. In this sense, for Honneth, they function as counterfactual dimensions of and for undamaged human sociability through which undamaged practical self-relations are formed and sustained.

Honneth draws on the social psychology of George Herbert Mead and the object-relations theory of Donald Winnicott to further articulate the moral-psychological categories he argues can be used as the basis of a theory of morally motivated struggle. He suggests that successful identity-formation involves certain modes of relating practically to oneself that can only be acquired and maintained through ongoing relations of mutual recognition. These practical self-relations—self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem—include not only emotional and physical well-being but also involve active processes in which individuals come to experience themselves as competent, valued and responsible social agents.

In this sense, relations of love and friendship are crucial if individuals are to successfully construct a sense of embodied self-confidence and enable them to articulate their own emotions, feelings and needs; relations of equality and the recognition of legal rights are vital to an individual’s dignity and autonomy in universal terms, and are fundamental to a sense of self-respect; finally, relations of solidarity (or communities of value) are crucial for establishing individual self-worth or esteem in relation to particular achievements and abilities, and accord an individual not only a unique identity but also a sense of a shared value horizon.

Honneth contends that a (weak formalistic) anthropology that can account for the preconditions of an ethical life has the critical potential to function as a resource for diagnosing the social pathologies of modern life. In this respect, Honneth articulates the project of social philosophy as one that both provides an analysis of those social pathologies that impede individual self-realisation and identifies the normatively grounded conditions by which healthy social relations can be measured. However, Honneth has long been critical of the tendency to measure the apparent 'health' or 'sickness' of a society only in terms of the yardstick of rationality.¹⁷ The problem with this perspective, suggests Honneth, is that pathologies that do not pertain to the cognitive dimensions of human beings cannot come to light at all, thereby resulting in a one-dimensional philosophical anthropology and an inadequate basis for social critique. As Nikolas Kompridis suggests in his essay in this volume, for Honneth, the normative criteria for Critical Theory are therefore not guided by rationality, but rather by the normativity grounded in undamaged forms of recognition. It is upon this ground that images of unimpeded self-realisation and the good life are built, marking what Kompridis refers to as an 'ethical turn' in Critical Theory.

The essays not only by Kompridis, but also Robert Sinnerbrink and Jean-Philippe Deranty, each discuss these aspects of Honneth's work, especially his concern with the struggle for recognition and his reconceptualisation of ethical life as a resource for diagnosing the social pathologies of modernity. Robert Sinnerbrink, in his "Recognitive Freedom: Hegel and the Problem of Recognition" begins with the theme of recognition in Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. He suggests that there are unresolved difficulties in Hegel's attempt to bring together the phenomenological account of unequal recognition with a normative one grounded in mutual recognition. As he points out, recent Hegel scholarship, typified most significantly by the work of Robert Williams, posits an implicit distinction between these two aspects of theorising.¹⁸ He implies that this distinction has also become imbedded in Honneth's analysis of social and political life. Drawing on Honneth's more recent work, especially his Spinoza Lectures, *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, Sinnerbrink argues that for Honneth forms of social action are grounded in contexts of ethical life which are themselves normative, and that the normative content of modern socio-ethical life is freedom. In other words, the ontological *cum* normative pre-condition of

recognition is given a historical content, which itself provides the basis for analyses and diagnoses of their absence, partiality or damage at the phenomenological level.

As Jean-Philippe Deranty points out in his essay “Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle: The Critical Potential of Honneth’s Theory of Recognition,” this is exactly where Honneth’s notion of struggle finds its full force—in his presupposition and analysis that claims of recognition are located in the very experience of injustice or misrecognition itself. This experience is an intersubjective one, which is simultaneously agonistic. The struggle *for* recognition entails that individual and collective social actors begin to assert and discover needs and aspects of their identity, which hitherto had been silenced and not recognised. In Deranty’s interpretation of his work, Honneth imbeds the normative claim for recognition in the agonistic activity of social struggles in a way that continues, generalises and extends Marx’s famous dictum, which now reads as ‘the history of all (modern) societies is the history of social struggles’—whoever the social actors are and whatever form the struggles take.

In this context, and as Nikolas Kompridis points out in his “From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the ‘Ethical Turn’ in Critical Theory,” the resources for a critical theory of the type put forward by Honneth are to be found in the gap between the normative demand for recognition, and its illegitimate denial. This illegitimate denial is both experienced and articulated, according to Honneth, and as Kompridis and Deranty both note, as affects and moral sentiments that occur through conflict and prior to their enunciation as arguments. However, according to Kompridis, self-realisation, the name Honneth gives to his specific ethical turn in Critical Theory, empties out and thus undercuts the critico-rationality claims that can be mobilised in the activity of social critique. Kompridis argues that there is an unresolved tension in Honneth’s work between the normative dimension, expressed as a philosophical anthropology of love, rights and solidarity, and the socio-historical ones expressed as a moral grammar of conflicts. In Kompridis’ view, Honneth swings between both poles. Either love, rights and solidarity are trans-historical features of all social actions, which gives them an affirmative dimension to social life and hence ends up down-playing the articulation of social conflict. Or, the historical dimension becomes predominant, the result of which is a phenomenological sociology of conflict in which the normative

dimension of social struggle can only be gestured to, and neither argued for nor opened to immanent critique.¹⁹

As Honneth's work, as well as the papers by Sinnerbrink, Deranty and Kompridis indicate, the recognition between self and other, or its absence and denial, implies a deepening and broadening of the basic anthropological premises of critical theory beyond the linguistic ones so paradigmatic of Habermas' work. Notions of love, rights and solidarity give affectual depth to the dramas of intersubjectivity, especially when they are tied not only to the recognition between self and other, but moreso, to its disavowal.

To be sure, struggle and violence, or figurations of power, more generally, and the normative horizons through which they can be contrasted and contested may be constitutive aspects of the dynamic nature of modernity and its intersubjectivities, however they exhaust neither modernity's topography nor the way these intersubjectivities may be grasped. A critical theory aimed at analysing the moral grammar of social conflicts also points to the value horizons that orientate the expression of these conflicts. For Honneth, these value horizons, as the papers by Sinnerbrink and Kompridis point out, are imbedded in and concretised as possible contemporary forms of the 'good life'. It is here that some points of contact emerge between the works of Honneth and Heller, notwithstanding their quite different philosophical anthropologies.²⁰ For both, values and a regard for the other are constituent dimensions of social life. To be sure, Honneth imbeds this concern in the founding and constitutive dimensions of recognitive intersubjectivity itself; for Heller, values provide the point of orientation for the recognition or otherwise of the other. Moreover, these values, for her, provide the means for a critique and defence of modernity in its democratic form, as well a critique of its totalitarian one.

IV. The Paradox of Freedom

As Agnes Heller points out in her essay "The Unmasking of the Metaphysicians or the Deconstructing of Metaphysics," there is an affinity between Adorno's attempt to critique and dismantle the metaphysics of philosophies of history and Popper's own critiques of the grand narratives that emanate from them. Both critiques concerned the totalitarian potential of modernity. In Adorno's case totalitarianism was located in the metaphysics of identity thinking, whilst

for Popper, it was found in the political expression of the grand narratives and their capacity to generate closed societies against open, democratic ones.

The end of totalitarianism, first in Eastern Europe and then later in Russia, in the wake of the 1989 'anti-totalitarian revolutions' (Morin) was heralded somewhat prematurely and one-dimensionally as the 'end of history'.²¹ These revolutions were not an exit from modernity, but were attempts to institute another modernity with its own legacies, myths and forms. As Stefan Auer notes in his "The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe," the great challenge of the revolutions of 1989 was how to replace a regime of unfreedom with one of freedom and not with new forms of tyranny or nationalistically inspired barbarism, the paradigm case of which became the Balkans. According to Auer, the revolutions of 1989 were confronted by two pasts of equal importance for the modern democratic world—the French revolutionary tradition, and the American one. In his view, as in the view of Edmond Burke, Hannah Arendt, and Agnes Heller, these revolutions were more reminiscent of the American struggle for independence. For them, this struggle was important not only for its republican dimension, but moreso because the founding fathers attempted to construct limits to political action, and to forge a political culture of sociable, rather than unsociable sociability.

Maria Márkus explores these aspects of Heller's work in her essay "In Search of a Home." This essay was occasioned by a *festschrift* in celebration of Agnes Heller's seventy-fifth birthday. We also acknowledge this occasion in the following brief discussion of Heller's work, and with the publication here of her essay on Popper which provides a point of reference for her major themes and preoccupations.

For Heller, the image of the possibility of sociable sociability frames her critique of modernity and the philosophical anthropology that informs it. For her, the linguistic constitution of intersubjectivity is not a primary concern either at the level of the way in which human beings are constituted, or at the level of political action. Rather, in Heller's view, values provide the motivating bridge between needs and their articulation in terms that are socially identifiable. According to Heller, all needs in all social contexts are subject to interpretation and evaluation through value categories that indicate whether they are socially recognised and viewed, for example, as good or bad, or right or wrong. They are the social *a priori* and provide the orientative categories

with which the world is navigated, and as such provide human life with meaning in both positive and negative terms.²²

For Heller, the primary constitutive value in modernity is that of freedom, which itself is paradoxical. In other words, Heller joins her philosophical anthropology to a theory of modernity and the priority that she gives to the value of freedom. From the perspective of the value of freedom, modernity is conceptualised by her as neither a problem to be solved, managed, or negated. Nor is it an unfinished project. Rather, she conceptualises modernity as an unresolvable paradox or double bind. For her, the paradox of modernity stems from its founding principle of the value of freedom; it is a foundation that provides no foundations. It is experienced and interpreted in a variety of ways.²³ In other words, if moderns are thrown into this condition of freedom, then this condition is experienced as one without anchors and points of orientation. It *is*, and is experienced, as a condition of contingency in which home, in both the existential and cultural sense, can no longer be taken for granted.

For Heller, there is a gap between a person's life as a modern and modernity's promissory note of freedom. This gap is experienced in everyday life with regard to a person's relation to the social divisions of labour, functions, wealth or power, and expressed more often than not as dissatisfaction. However, in her view, the special gift of this promissory note is that this dissatisfaction can be articulated not simply as conflict, but that this conflict can be transposed into political conflict and the mobilisation of political power. Heller approaches her image of the contestatory dimension of modernity from the vantagepoint of two modern political projects or paradigms through which this contestation has been mobilised—a redemptive paradigm with its totalitarian versions, and a democratic paradigm, especially its republican version. The redemptive paradigm attempts to redeem the pathologies of society in a single, grand gesture of *ressentiment*. In modernity this takes shape as totalitarianism, which attempts to resolve the paradox of freedom by integrating the competing logics or imaginaries of modernity under a hyper-logic of the state to create a different modernity. The exemplary models for this other type of modernity were Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and more recently are to be found in the new terrorisms.²⁴ In this sense, they belong to the historical-interpretative imaginary of modernity, which gives shape and credence to contestatory actions, but from a redemptive perspective.

In contrast to the paradigm of totalitarianism Heller also constructs an ideal-type of the democratic paradigm, which is also different to the liberal model with its split between the economic-public and private spheres and its philosophical anthropology of singular private interest. Heller's concept of the political is the nadir point where, for her, the double bind or the paradox of freedom comes to rest. Put slightly differently, for Heller the paradox of freedom comes to rest at the concept of the political.²⁵ Whilst the paradox of freedom between expectations and realities is keenly felt in everyday life, its constant political topicalisation entails that the concept of the political expands beyond formal bounds and procedures (liberalism), or Arendt's own version of the demos that acts politically only on political issues.²⁶ According to Heller, each position is based on a principle of exclusion; for liberalism the excluded are those who are outside the process, whilst for Arendt, social concerns are excluded from political discourse and action.

In contrast to both, Heller argues that the concept of the political must be an inclusive one derived from politically effective values, of which freedom is the most universalisable. Here the double bind is experienced as a dynamic conflict between interpretations of freedom (and hence its extensions) and concrete experiences of its lack or partiality in any sphere of life. Thus, the experience of dissatisfaction and the dynamic conflict that this engenders is bought to life politically in the public domain where the universal value of freedom is thematised and made concrete. In Heller's view, "the concretisation of the universal value of freedom in the public domain is the modern concept of the political."²⁷ In this context, for her, the substantive aspect of modern politics does not revolve around the issue or the topic, but the fact that people are reflectively and hence dynamically part of the double bind itself.

Heller's argument is that when people articulate the universal value of freedom they invoke a strong and weak claim. The stronger claim is that no-one nor any topic can be excluded from the public domain. The weak claim is that the public domain and the activity of the actors *qua* political actors participate in an ethos of the empirical universality of freedom. The nature of the contest and its limit revolves around whether one accepts the notion of freedom, and the symmetrical reciprocity of the other that this presupposes, as part of the terms of the dispute. If one does, otherness flourishes. Under

these conditions all participants in the public domain implicitly or explicitly share an agreement in freedom, and a critique and distance from the principles of unfreedom, for example paternalism, racism, or genocide. In this sense, Heller's work is not only a response to the jacobin-leninist current in radical philosophy, but also contemporary critical theories of power and difference. In her view, otherness and difference are already built into the dynamics of modernity and its paradox. It is already really and potentially contestatory.

To be sure, the contestatory dimension of political life is a condition of unsociable sociability. Yet, for Heller, politics is not simply the agonistic game of power. It also attests to and requires some basic conditions of sociable sociability in which political argument and an attitude of 'friendly regard' towards the other co-exist. However, this cannot be achieved without some form of institutional or cultural context, which provide both support and succour for a form of modern sociable intersubjectivity. In other words freedom, interpreted from this perspective requires a home in which each person can be an end for him or herself, and being at home is an end in itself.

As Maria Márkus notes in her essay, for Heller, there are two possible homes that moderns can make and inhabit in this way—the sphere of European high culture, and the American model of democracy. For Heller, the former provides the model for a conversational, and not only argumentative, public sphere in which the experience derived from "is a lived experience not because it necessarily comes from 'experiencing together', it is also lived by recollecting together and exchanging memories."²⁸ The latter provides the ground for an imaginary political community of citizens who feel jointly responsible for its continuity. Moreover, the political community, as Heller points out in her "The Unmasking of the Metaphysicians or the Deconstructing of Metaphysics," is orientated by an unfindable but still believed fiction of 'natural rights' enumerated in *The Declaration of Independence*.

However, as Maria Márkus also notes, there are many difficulties with each of these homes. The increasing pluralisation and expansion of culturally located and received points of orientation and interpretation has resulted in not only a fragmentation of cultural conversations, but also their specialisation and insulation from one another. Cultural sensualists only speak to others who share their particular specialist discourse, and with neither spirit nor heart, to paraphrase Weber. Cultural conversation becomes cultural discourse,

which also becomes instrumentalised. Particular cultures or cultural artefacts are consumed and stored as if they are products.

For both Maria Márkus and Agnes Heller, the empirical condition of American democracy attests that all is not well in that home either. Yet, it is not only its empirical condition that is of concern. The paradox of freedom entails that modern societies are politically dynamic not only in a contestatory sense, but also that this more or less permanent and more or less open form is derived from the propensity to permanently question not only social conditions, but also the very presuppositions of freedom itself. The dynamic nature of the paradox of freedom could entail that democracy questions itself out of existence.²⁹

For Agnes Heller and Maria Márkus, though, there are no exists from these cultural or political conditions of modernity. Solutions that wish to resolve the tensions and paradoxes of the modern constellation potentially result in the totalitarian option. However, modernity's dynamism and its lack of resolution does not result, for them, in nostalgia, resignation, or withdrawal but in the affirmation of possible homes, constituted and informed by the value of freedom and forms of sociable sociability through which it may be articulated.

Modernity, then, as the essays in this volume attest, is a time that is permanently out of joint. It is not an historical form that attests exclusively to affirmation nor destruction, but to a permanent tension between its competing 'gods and demons'. Efforts to capture the complexity of the contingent, tension-ridden and incomplete constellation of modernity, then, depend on the starting point that throws its other aspects into relief. The reduction of the subject to both instrumentalism and even the political can be thrown into relief by a philosophy of *selbstgefühl* which emphasises the ineffability and inarticulatability of subjectivity. It can also be thrown into relief by a philosophy of recognition that remains open to the other, in a manner that can range across the breadth and depth of all human experiences including not only political and agonistic ones but also those that concern love and friendship, their comedies and their tragedies. Furthermore, openness can be viewed as more than simply a speech act or an act of world disclosure. Openness discloses not merely truth, nor norms, nor even authenticity, but values that enable subjects to remain open to otherness, and yet can let others be.

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Notes

- ¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003; Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflexive Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge, MA. & London, The MIT Press, 1991 and “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy,” in *Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. David Rasmussen, Oxford & Cambridge, MA., Blackwell Publishers, 1996; Manfred Frank, *What is Neo-Structuralism?*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989; Agnes Heller, “Death of the Subject?,” *Thesis Eleven*, no. 25, 1990, pp. 22-38, reprinted in *Can Modernity Survive?*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, pp. 61-78; and *A Theory of Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- ² See for example, Manfred Frank, “Self-Consciousness and Self-Knowledge: On Some Difficulties with the Reduction of Subjectivity,” *Constellations*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2002, pp. 390-408, and “Against *a priori* Intersubjectivism: An Alternative Inspired by Sartre,” in *Critical Theory After Habermas Encounters and Departures*, eds. Dieter Freundlieb, Wayne Hudson, and John Rundell, Leiden, Brill, 2004, pp. 259-279; Axel Honneth, “Work and Instrumental Action: On the Normative Basis of Critical Theory” in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. C. Wright, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995; Agnes Heller, “Habermas and Marxism,” and “The Discourse Ethics of Habermas: Critique and Appraisal” in *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism*, eds. Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1991.
- ³ Manfred Frank, “Style in Philosophy” Part I, *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1999, pp. 145-167, and Parts II & III, *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1999, pp. 264-301; Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Feelings*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1979; Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1995.
- ⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 11-29.
- ⁵ Frank on “Self-consciousness and Self-knowledge: On Some Difficulties with the Reduction of Subjectivity,” *Constellations*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2002, pp. 391-408. For previous discussions of Frank’s work see Karl Ameriks, “From Kant to Frank: The Ineliminable Subject,” in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, *The Modern Subject Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, 1999, Stony Brook, State University of New York Press, pp. 217-230; Andrew Bowie’s comprehensive, “Introduction” in Manfred Frank, *The Subject and the Text: Essays on Literary Theory and Philosophy*, Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ⁶ See Manfred Frank, “Style in Philosophy,” Part I, *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 30, no. 3, July 1999, pp. 145-167, and “Style in Philosophy,” Parts II & III, *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 30, no. 4, October, 1999, pp. 264-301.
- ⁷ Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewußtseins-Theorien von Fichte bis Sartre. Mit einem Nachwort*

- "Fragmente zu einer Geschichte der Selbstbewußtseins-Theorien von Fichte bis Sartre, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 413-599, (parts I-VIII are published here).
- ⁸ See also Manfred Frank's "Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity [*Unding*]? On Some Difficulties in Naturalistic Reductions of Self-Conscious," in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, eds. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, Stony Brook, State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 177-197.
- ⁹ Manfred Frank, "Style in Philosophy," Part II, p. 271. See Part II of "Style in Philosophy," for a fuller discussion.
- ¹⁰ Schelling quoted in Frank, "Fragments of a History of the Theory of Self-Consciousness from Kant to Kierkegaard," in this volume.
- ¹¹ Denis de Rougement, for example argues that the experience of love comes to an end with modernity. See his *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983; *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, revised and augmented, London, Faber and Faber. For a counter position see Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, Volumes 1-3, 1984, Chicago, Chicago University Press. See Singer's discussion of de Rougement in *The Nature of Love*, Volume 3, "Love in the Modern World," pp. 370-372. See also John Rundell, "Love and Modernity: Eros and Imagination," *Divinatio*, vol. 14, Autumn-Winter, 2001, pp. 5-28.
- ¹² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, London, Allen and Unwin, 1932; Alfred Weber, *Farewell to European History or the Conquest of European Nihilism*, trans. R.F.C. Hall, London, Kegan Paul, 1947; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London, Verso, 1979.
- ¹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, Boston, Beacon Press, 1994.
- ¹⁴ See A. Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality" and "Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on a Theory of Recognition" in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. C. Wright, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995; "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today," *Constellations*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1994.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* Also see, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle For Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Oxford & Cambridge, MA, Polity Press, 1995.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ See Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect" and *Critique of Power*. On Honneth's arguments for a weak formalistic anthropology and the tasks of a social philosophy, see for example, "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," in *Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. David Rasmussen, Oxford & Cambridge, MA., Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

- ¹⁸ Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997; see Honneth's discussion of Hegel's *Jena Lectures* in *The Struggle for Recognition*.
- ¹⁹ To be sure Honneth has responded to these criticisms in his more recent work. See his "Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions," *Inquiry*, no. 45, 2002, pp. 499-520.
- ²⁰ See the discussion of Heller's theory of instincts and needs in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, trans. Raymond Meyer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, especially, pp. 91-101.
- ²¹ See Edgar Morin, "The Anti-Totalitarian Revolutions," in *Between Totalitarianism and Postmodernity*, eds. Peter Beilharz, Gillian Robinson, and John Rundell, Boston, The MIT Press, 1992; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Free Press, 1992.
- ²² Agnes Heller, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Value," *Kinesis*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1972; "Rationality of Intellect, Rationality of Reason," in *The Power of Shame*, London, Routledge, 1985.
- ²³ Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity; The Three Logics of Modernity and the Double Bind of the Modern Imagination*, Collegium Budapest Public Lecture Series, no. 23, 2001; for an earlier version see "Class, Modernity, Democracy" in F. Fehér and A. Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom and Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 1986, pp. 201-242.
- ²⁴ Agnes Heller, "An Imaginary Preface to the 1984 Edition of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," in F. Fehér and A. Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom and Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 1986, pp. 243-259; "911, or Modernity and Terror," *Constellations*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2002; "A Tribute to the Citizens of New York," *TCDS/ECEP Bulletin*, vol. 11/3, Issue 39, pp. 2-3. See also Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship Over Needs*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- ²⁵ Agnes Heller, "The Concept of the Political Revisited," in *Can Modernity Survive?*, p. 122.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-127.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ²⁸ Maria Márkus, "Agnes Heller, In Search of a Home," p. 398 below.
- ²⁹ This is an implication of Heller's discussion of her concepts of dynamic justice and of an incomplete ethic-political concept of justice in *Beyond Justice*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Karl Ameriks

The Key Role of *Selbstgefühl* in Philosophy's Aesthetic and Historical Turns

ABSTRACT

In *Selbstgefühl*, Manfred Frank provides a detailed study of the eighteenth century origins and contemporary philosophical implications of a unique kind of direct self-awareness. The growing significance of this phenomenon is closely related to three interconnected developments in modern philosophy, which I describe as the 'subjective turn', the 'aesthetic turn', and the 'historical turn'. While following Frank in emphasising key concepts in the first of these two turns, I add a stress on the historical turn in post-Kantian philosophical writing.

KEYWORDS: subjectivity, feeling, self, aesthetic turn, historical turn, subjective turn

I. Subjectivity and the Aesthetic Turn

In philosophy are the terms 'subjective' and 'aesthetic' primarily terms of praise *or* of disdain, and—whichever answer is taken—why? This is, of course, an incomplete question; in some contexts, some eras, one answer can seem clearly appropriate, whereas in another context just the opposite answer could seem better. This leads to more specific questions: how was it that these terms *became so* closely

linked and relevant to philosophy, when did they first dominate, and what is their status and relation today? These are very broad questions that no doubt could be approached in a variety of ways, but I'll try to make some headway with them by focusing on the area I am most familiar with, the ongoing history of Critical philosophy.

From the start, Critical forms of philosophy showed an especially strong tendency to combine and privilege realms that they *explicitly* designated as subjective and aesthetic. Consider the 'Copernican turn' and Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, the subversive fragments of the German Early Romantics, and the resounding manifesto of the "Earliest System Program" of the Tübingen/Jena post-Kantians. Soon, however, the subjective—but *not* so much the aesthetic—component of Critical thought came under heavy attack from within mainstream German philosophy itself. For the Hegel of 1801 and after—as also for dominant later thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer—the achievement of a fully modern appreciation of the resources of a liberated and therefore properly aesthetic orientation, hence of an authentic life and culture at all, lay in overcoming any (supposedly) 'merely subjective' response to the alliance of earlier dogmatic ethical and religious views.¹ Thus Kant himself, and then each of his 'Critical heirs' in turn—Fichte, Schlegel, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach, and so on—came to be scolded by their successors for remaining all too subjective in their approach, for not grasping and utilising the 'real premises' and fully objective sources of progress and liberation.² Then the screw turned yet again. For the 'Critical Theory' generation, the nineteenth century's pseudo-scientific notion of an absolute and fully 'objective' ground of liberation became itself an obstacle to be overcome. Twentieth century theorists such as Benjamin and Adorno, and followers such as Terry Eagleton and Jay Bernstein, began to salvage the Critical potential of the subjective notes of dissonance expressed in perceptive (and primarily aesthetic) fragments by figures such as Schlegel, Hölderlin and Kierkegaard.³ Nonetheless, in many quarters the interest of Critical Theory in subjectivity became submerged in discussions of social formation, consensus and structures of discourse.⁴ At the same time, in the dominant strands of twentieth-century thought, the subject, especially in its so-called Cartesian (or allegedly Kantian) 'monological' form, came under heavy siege from all directions and was repeatedly declared dead by Continental

'neo-structuralists' and analytic philosophers alike.⁵ And yet, at the end of the millennium, auspicious signs of another reversal began to appear. Work by leading analytic philosophers such as Saul Kripke, Roderick Chisholm and Thomas Nagel gave new encouragement to the minority in Anglophone philosophy and elsewhere who continued to suspect that notions such as consciousness and subjectivity are irreplaceable in the most rigorous scientific and philosophic positions.⁶ Meanwhile in Europe, more positive treatments of subjectivity (across the spectrum, from Todorov and Renaut to late Foucault and Badiou) appeared in France, and in Germany mainline figures such as Dieter Henrich and his students made influential arguments for a conception of subjectivity that need not be undermined by the deconstructive claims of the ever-growing crowd following Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty and others.

Within this latest movement, the work of Manfred Frank deserves special attention because of its extensive exploration of the close links between subjectivity, aesthetics and the history of Critical thought. In earlier work, I have drawn attention to the complex relation between two 'bipolar' manifestations of subjectivity that Frank has emphasised: first, the 'base level' subjectivity of *immediate 'feeling' qua self-familiarity*, called '*ungegenständliche Selbstvertrautheit*' or '*Selbstgefühl*', and, second, the higher-order phenomenon of *personal style*, particularly as expressed in the complexities of understanding and writing featured in the path-breaking hermeneutical investigations by Romantic figures such as Schleiermacher.⁷ (Simply for shorthand purposes, I will take the liberty sometimes of referring to all of these different, but also closely related, aspects of subjectivity under the common heading of *Selbstgefühl*, the title of Frank's most recent book on the topic.)

Note that the phenomena Frank highlights have an obvious significance for *aesthetics in general*, since it is easy to see how their everyday manifestations can serve as the natural source for paradigmatic explicitly aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, the distinctive character of *modern aesthetics in particular* seems very closely connected to the Romantics' specific way of emphasising feeling and style, and to their innovative philosophical conception—inspired by figures such as Rousseau and Jacobi—of the ultimately *receptive* nature of the subjectivity that underlies these phenomena. As Frank has argued in great

detail, many of the most significant philosophical and aesthetic achievements of the Early Romantics rest directly on their surprising and literally revolutionary idea of the subject. Their key claim, which was pressed especially by Novalis, is that the subject—*contrary* to Fichte and most stereotypical understandings of Romanticism itself⁸—does *not* ‘posit’ itself as an absolute ego (which would know anything passive only as a posited counter-force to its own original activity), but is instead encountered originally in a basic and continuous experience of *Selbstgefühl* marked by the key passive feature of feeling, that is, of *givenness*.⁹ In other words, despite the unforgettable claim of Goethe’s *Faust* that ‘in the beginning was the deed’, it does *not* follow that the avant-garde of Weimar/Jena all thought in such terms—*Faust* and Fichte are not necessarily the best guides to show you the town.

To substantiate his point further, Frank has most recently documented in great detail how several now forgotten philosophical psychologists of the eighteenth century (not only Platner and Tetens, but also Heydenreich, Merian, Hissman and others), who were closely connected with the Romantics, explicitly employed numerous variations of the new term ‘*Selbstgefühl*’, or ‘*sentiment de soi-meme*’, as the signature for this primordial kind of receptive experience, which was suddenly arousing widespread interest.¹⁰ The depth of this interest cannot be explained by the merely external fact of the precipitous loss of respect for traditional sources of meaning. One must also consider the fertile and bipolar internal nature of the experience itself. At its base level, it offers an immediate revelation of both the self and existence (actuality, being) as such, and thus provides an intimate form of certainty found nowhere else. Furthermore, the base experience also naturally lends itself toward being elaborated in several higher order forms, culminating in the development of a personal and authentic style, as in the aphorisms, fancies and novels of Novalis and Jean-Paul. This style takes one far beyond the wholly pre-conceptual immediacy of the base level, and yet, in all its sophistication it remains essentially connected to the ineliminable subjective particularity of that level.¹¹ It thus is to be sharply contrasted both with any specific *quality* of a typical sensory state—for this reveals only *how* something feels but not *that* it is, and that it is *for* a subject—and with any *typical* conceptual, introspective or reflective *activity*, for this is defined by an objectifying character lacking a direct sense of one’s subjectivity as such.

It is worth noting that there are other features related to the experience that could be and were emphasised. In many quarters, the initial understanding of ‘*Selbstgefühl*’ stressed a kind of heightened psychological or moral self-awareness (recall the double meaning of the French term, ‘*conscience*’, and the ambiguity of the German term ‘*Selbstbewußtsein*’, which can signify either self-awareness or self-confidence), such as the immediate Kantian appreciation of one’s individual human dignity,¹² or versions of Schleiermacher’s intuitive feeling of our being fundamentally dependent in a religious way.¹³ These kinds of experience were very familiar at the time, and they also manifest the basically receptive nature of subjectivity that is central to *Selbstgefühl*, and so there is an important question here about why these forms eventually came to play a *secondary* role in what proved to be the most influential line of thought concerned with this phenomenon. Despite the deep pull of new ‘subjective’ experiences of both morality and religion, the fact of the matter is that it was instead the specific complexities of the new forms of what we would call basically *aesthetic* creation, appreciation and life (though they themselves often gave it other names) that provided the Romantics with the main manifestations of the general structure of *Selbstgefühl*. It was in this sphere, more than anywhere else, that the Romantics showed how the complexities of *Selbstgefühl* exhibit, in an especially vivid manner, those striking peculiarities of an individual’s feeling and personal style that go beyond anything fully explainable by mere material or psychological data, or by any pre-given sets of common rules or behaviour, that is, the products of ‘typical conceptual, introspective, or reflective activity’. This was a momentous event. After the late modern separation of science and philosophy, philosophy might well have sought its main partner in religion, morality or politics. Some may even contend that this is what happened—but on my interpretation, the reason why Romanticism seems as important to us as it does now is that, for better or worse, it prefigured the fact that, from Bloomsbury to Freiburg and Paris, modern philosophy on the whole has turned out to take what is best characterised as an aesthetic rather than an ethical or religious ‘turn’.

One reason that this turn was possible is that even though the moments of feeling and style, which mark subjectivity’s distinctive ‘low’ and ‘high’ poles, are especially closely connected to aesthetics in its best known forms (the creation and criticism of the arts), they do not have a ‘merely’ aesthetic significance. They are important not only because of the Romantics’ intense artistic

interest in them, but also because, by no accident, their features parallel the best-known stumbling blocks for contemporary forms of philosophical materialism. These are sentience and sapience, or the mysterious phenomena of qualia and intentionality, both of which are closely connected to the peculiar feature of the apparently irreducible direct self-referentiality of subjectivity.¹⁴ I say ‘mysterious’ because the ‘irreducibility’ of these subjective phenomena remains a matter of intense and seemingly interminable debate in the professional literature.¹⁵ At this point, however, rather than offering yet another attempted solution to the vexed question of irreducibility, or even claiming that a clear resolution will ever be in sight, I will simply make two observations. Firstly, the issue seems to be a deep and genuine one, not to be dismissed as an incidental pseudo-problem or matter of words. Secondly, there is nonetheless an important and relatively neglected question here on which some progress may be possible for us, namely: *how* is it that the phenomena of subjectivity *have in fact come* to take on such a central role in our thought and culture? In other words, whatever subjectivity is ‘in itself’, what does it say *about us* that we now worry so much about it, and how does this interest relate to what I would argue is the other striking feature of the philosophy of our time, namely that our way of trying to do justice to subjectivity involves not only an aesthetic but also an *historical* turn?

II. The Historical Turn

Before turning back, in a third and final section, to offering an assessment of what I consider to be some of the most striking implications of the phenomena highlighted in Frank’s work on *Selbstgefühl*, I must first devote a transitional section to explaining the main features of what is meant by the ‘historical turn’ in philosophy, because, on my account, this happens to be very closely connected to the mysterious fact of modern philosophy’s aesthetic turn and its preoccupation with subjectivity.

Victor Cousin was not the first to notice the phenomenon of an historical turn, but he reacted to it in an especially memorable way when he pressed the question—which now must also be our own—of what, if any, is the ‘higher need’¹⁶ behind philosophy’s growing interest in the history of philosophy? There is a relatively obvious immediate response to Cousin’s question, but it is one that only scratches the surface. It is well-known that in the 1800s the

study of the history of philosophy suddenly became a dominant part of philosophy itself, especially in courses at German universities that in effect replaced the old focus on theological accounts of providence. These courses aimed at perpetuating the 'legend' that there is something like a timeless and rationally satisfying 'idea' of philosophy that we need to learn through its history. The immediate source of this idea is clear enough—it was mainly, although not uniquely, stimulated by Hegel's thought that "history represents the coming into being of our science (i.e. philosophy)."17 (Elsewhere, I have argued that Hegel's most valuable ideas here, and the key sustainable features of the 'historical turn', were anticipated in a fundamental way by another Jena figure, Karl Reinhold, Kant's first and most influential interpreter—but since Hegel is much better known, for simplicity's sake I will concentrate on him here.)18 Hegel's historical approach involves insisting on systematic characterisations of the 'main' 'principles' present in various works and eras, and ordering them tightly in terms of a logical and metaphysical narrative of an all-encompassing process of 'development' and 'progress'. This notion had an enormous impact far beyond its initial idealist context, but most of us would now agree that there are serious problems with the extraordinarily demanding nature of Hegel's specific conception of 'development'. All the same, the general thought behind his approach obviously goes back to significant ideas that are not limited to his own audacious system, and they deserve careful re-examination.

As Hegel himself would be the first to stress, his work must be placed in a broader context. If one steps back just a bit, the growing attention given to the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century appears as part of a much broader pattern, one in which disciplines and lifestyles of *all* sorts had become *explicitly* historical even earlier—most notably, toward the end of the eighteenth century.19 Once one reflects on this *general* process of historicisation, however, developments in *philosophy in particular at this time* take on an especially puzzling appearance. It is, after all, a discipline that had always made an especially strong claim to remaining above the flux of time and culture, and this is an idea that Kant and the dominant figures of his generation clearly intended to vindicate. Nonetheless, as I have argued in detail elsewhere, it was precisely in the first hotbed of Kantian studies, that is, late 1780s Jena, that the original and remarkable phenomenon of an 'historical turn' in philosophy occurred.20 It was at this time and place that—all at once—

historical considerations *suddenly* and *irrevocably* became *central to mainstream philosophy*.²¹ Moreover, although this turn has long had an influence, it seems to have taken on its most interesting form at precisely the two key moments that are of prime concern to us here: at its birth in the Romantic era right before the nineteenth century, and then in our own time. One cannot help but ask, what is the ‘higher need’ that originated the historical turn *even before* 1800 and the influence of Hegel, and what need is it that still makes it seem so relevant to us now, *long afterwards*?

At different times, of course, different versions of this need may dominate. The most widespread interest in history in our own time, for example, is probably attached not to orthodox Hegelian claims about necessary ‘progress’ or ‘development’, but rather to the suspicion that what history discloses is precisely the lack of any such development. Consider that side of our interest in history that has to do primarily with themes such as historicism, relativism, ‘strong reading’ and deconstruction, and with the more provocative ideas disseminated by figures such as Harold Bloom, Paul Feyerabend, and Richard Rorty. Since the influence of their work, what the word ‘history’ conjures up at first for most of us is not at all a linear image of ascent or decline, or a picture of a static or cyclical dominance of ‘eternal principles’, but instead a process that can be even much more anarchic than anything Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Foucault outlined—for, the work of these figures, after all, still offers what is at least a structured genealogy with fairly distinct periods and clearly dominant directions.

The threat of a *radically historical, that is historicist*, conception of history is especially relevant for the history of *modern philosophy* for the following reason. Recall the general fact, just noted, of an historicisation of disciplines *throughout* the modern university, and the fact that this was accompanied by an intense interest in the phenomenon of ‘progressive development’. This is a remarkable fact—but note that all this is still compatible with the practice of a complex of disciplines and a view of knowledge that in a sense remains basically *non-historical* in nature. In the exact sciences, not only the objects of the disciplines, but also the findings of the specialists themselves, involve change, and even ‘revolution’ in all sorts of ways. And yet there still remains strong confidence that here we have gained possession of a core set of *constant* principles and refined methods that are *clearly* agreed upon and that

can be adequately approached by focusing simply on *current* techniques. For these disciplines, despite what some readers of Kuhn might contend, history is more an incidental background than a fundamental problem.

With areas such as philosophy, however, historical concern has a more central role, one involving the disquieting modern worry that the discipline itself, despite what figures such as Hegel and Kant insist, is not—and never will be—a ‘science’ at all in any strict current English sense. This worry took on a very pressing character in the later eighteenth century. Right at that time, two highly disturbing trends were beginning to develop. First, there was a slow, but growing, decline in relatively easy moves back and forth between the new exact sciences and philosophy, moves that geniuses such as Leibniz and Descartes once made with eerie confidence, in their basic principles and day-to-day scholarly life. (And so it became more and more odd for physicists to be called professors of ‘natural philosophy’.) The highly developed exact sciences began to grow in a way that eventually forced most philosophers to realise that what they are doing is *not* ‘science’ in the new strict (and paradigmatically clear) sense; Hume is not ‘another Newton’.

Second, and simultaneously, an avalanche of social, economic and religious changes made Europeans in general more sensitive than ever to the diversity of human cultures as a kind of variety that is not a matter of easily charted steps on a progressive chain (as in natural science), or an illustration of principles which are eternal and such that their temporal instantiation is merely incidental. I take Herder to be the philosopher who encouraged historicist thinking along this line in the most vivid and influential manner.²² The crucial implication of Herder’s work is that philosophy is on the whole more like art than science—and more like ever-changing romantic art than any kind of perennial classicism. Herder’s work was path-breaking in emphasising that ancient (and even pre-Athenian) art and thought is remarkable in its own manner, and is not a mere form of pre-modernism or even ‘pre-Socratism’. Different eras, and the different leading thinkers who crystallise the ‘principles’ of these eras, appear to think *differently*, and not necessarily ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than others in any sense that involves trying to get closer to exactly the same kind of target. (To be sure, this idea by itself does not necessarily lead to historicist relativism, and Herder’s own position is much more complex than I have indicated, but its main effect was surely the encouragement

of a radically historicist position, and for the sake of simplicity I will use his name to signify that position.)²³

Herder's work was very well known at first, especially to Kant, Reinhold, and Hegel (all of whom he knew directly), but their reactions tended to smother signs of his direct influence. Kant notoriously rejected the views of Herder—his former student—altogether, because Kant (despite his very interesting work on explicitly historical topics) aimed to protect a classical vision of philosophy as an eternal science still very much like mathematics. What Reinhold and then, most famously, Hegel—and others such as Schelling, Schlegel, and Schleiermacher—attempted was something more ambitious. They can be read as moving, not from Kantian ahistoricism to radical Herderian historicism, but instead toward a way of doing philosophy that expressly presents itself as a *synthesis* of both the ahistorical systematic intentions found in figures such as Plato, Leibniz and Spinoza, and the deeply historical insights stressed by Herder (and somewhat kindred figures such as Montesquieu and Rousseau). In contrast to what they took to be Kant's overreactionary ahistoricism and Herder's overly relativistic historical approach, they invented a model of a philosophy that is *at once* historical and systematic.

There was, of course, not always a perfect balance. The Romantics often tended toward historicism, and in many of the Idealist philosophies the systematic element was still very dominant, since they aimed to display nothing less than a *complete* solution to the whole dialectic of fundamental problems that had arisen in the extremes of earlier philosophies. Whatever the exact balance, the main point is that, in integrating the task of a detailed historical *Auseinandersetzung* with their predecessors into the basic structure of their philosophic writing, the Jena school found a way of presenting the sequence of Herder's diverse 'main' 'principles' as not a mere colourful cavalcade but a necessary—and necessarily argumentative—sequence, a *Bildungsgeschichte* that *must be philosophically experienced* if we are truly to know others and ourselves. Hegel's own *Phenomenology* (see especially the Introduction) was distinctive, and overly restrictive, in insisting on a very strong threefold demand that the development of this history be demonstrably metaphysically 'necessary', that it move through the specific dialectic of 'determinate negation', and that it exhibit a 'complete' rational system. This Hegelian model was enormously influential, but it should not monopolise our thinking. Without

giving up the most basic features of the historical turn, philosophers can retreat—and have retreated—from all three of Hegel’s ‘dead’ strong demands in order to pursue a ‘living’ and more ‘modest’ historical approach that stresses elements of fundamental contingency, incompleteness, and a plurality of ‘developmental’ models.²⁴

This historical approach has advantages that can help explain its growing appeal. On the one hand, against non-historical thought, the historical approach, in its stress on the importance and difficulties of interpretation and contextual understanding, marks out a way in which philosophy can appear, in many ways, deeper and more complex than natural science, something that addresses aspects of subjectivity that cannot to be measured or explained by science’s ‘merely objective’ or predictive improvements in our knowledge of natural fact. On the other hand, against the historicists, this approach can insist that it remains backed by systematic arguments, by the giving of intricately connected general reasons which show that—despite the conflict of historical doctrines—there exists a meaningful and evolving conceptual pattern underlying the maze of options that philosophy presents.

The historical approach has had its own historical ups and downs. Hegel’s uniquely ambitious form of an attempt at a synthesis soon outlived its high point. Despite the ‘legend’ of a progressive history of philosophy presented at mainline nineteenth century universities, leading thinkers did not really believe it. We can now see that the key motor of philosophical progress then was rather an initially ‘off the main track’ radicalisation of the deep Leibniz/Herder split that had arisen just prior to the unique synthesis proposed by the historical idealists from Reinhold to Hegel. Thus there arose the ‘revolution in philosophy’ led by neo-Leibnizians, from Bolzano to Russell and Carnap, which formed the dominant analytic departments of the twentieth century that tended to turn their back on the notion that the history of philosophy has an essential significance.²⁵ And there also arose the opposed ‘underground’ movement of quasi-Herderians—not only Isaiah Berlin, but all the anarchists, existentialists, post-modernists, and particularists who feel more at home in a literature, history of ideas or sociology department than in a mainline philosophy seminar.

In our own time, however, a significant third party has again arisen in contrast to these long-opposed extremes. It retains the *core* feature of Reinhold

and Hegel's 'turn', namely, the idea of a *basic linkage* of historical and systematic thought, while stressing the need for a new and more modest form. This new perspective—which can be found, for example, in the 'Cambridge ideas in context' projects of figures such as Jerry Schneewind, Quentin Skinner, and Raymond Geuss—involves the practice of combining historical and systematic considerations *without* assuming, as Reinhold and Hegel did, that there is an *evident* and *necessary* pattern of *unified progress* to be plotted out in *all* our basic ways of thinking. In other words, philosophical writing can be at once fundamentally systematic *and* historical, and even in some sense developmental, *without* becoming either historicist or naively linear, even in a complex dialectical fashion.

The move to history, on this perspective, involves not a proof of 'progress' in any allegedly scientific sense, but rather a disclosure of *significant dependence* in our self-understanding in a way that is both deeply conceptual and contextual. What makes the views of earlier thinkers on key topics—for example, Aristotle and Kant on virtue and self-control—specifically historical and relevant to us (despite their not leading to a science) must be something more than the mere fact that these figures are different and not here. If that were all there is to it, we might as well be looking at an exotic bird through a telescope. What is crucial is that we acknowledge figures such as Aristotle and Kant as our own *argumentative* but *distant* ancestors. The thought here is that we can understand ourselves as who we basically are only by (among other things) figuring out better how we can 'become true' to the 'events' that past *thought* introduced as the main, even if highly non-transparent, guides to the self-defining culture that we have become and presume that we will continue to be.²⁶ On this view, there is, for example, no reason to suppose that there is a ready-made problem of 'virtue' 'in itself', totally independent of the very complex causal and intentional history that has come down to us, and formed our very self-image and self, our second nature, from the days in which the notion was discussed among the Greeks. This is not to say, however, that the problem is a 'mere' historical construct; rather, there is every reason to think that it, somewhat like various natural techniques developed over time, gives us a better insight into what we 'really' are.

If past figures were not approached as *argumentative* ancestors, we could appropriate their ideas without systematic consideration, as a prejudice, or

simply in the objective way that a weather reading from an old manual might be taken over by a later scientist, without any philosophical reflection. And if they were not *distant* ancestors, we would not have to engage in the special hermeneutical work that—as Herder, Schleiermacher, and other Romantics have taught us—is required if we are to remain genuinely open to uncovering a way of thought that may be *deeply* different, perhaps more ‘world-disclosing’ now than ever before, and not simply a crude form of what we already believe. And if they were not *our* main predecessors, linked through a common causal and intentional path to problems that confront us now as well, then we would not always have to keep attentive to the possibility that in some ways they may turn out to be ‘closer’ to our very selves—that is, more revelatory of our own fundamental nature—than anything ‘merely’ contemporary.

In sum, even if, contra Hegel, our concern with philosophy and its history need *not* be a matter of philosophy’s ever literally ‘becoming a science’, it still can be true that the Jena writers were correct in turning us around toward a genuinely philosophical concern with our own conceptual history, a concern that is more than a matter of merely ‘understanding’ something ‘other’.²⁷ The ‘higher need’ that we are satisfying when we turn to history then is not to confirm, whiggishly, what our great ‘progress’ supposedly has already been or had to be, but rather to learn, by detailed description and argument, how much the past can still reveal to us of what we must yet do to know and truly satisfy our very own selves. This is always in large part a matter of becoming truer to our own *philosophical* origins—just as any proper descendants may seek best to realise themselves, as well as their ancestors, by uncovering the deepest and most ‘sacred’ ‘charges’ that have not yet been fulfilled by the event of their own ‘family’ (a family that can, of course, always become further extended).²⁸

III. Subjectivity and the Aesthetic and Historical Turns Together

What has been clarified so far is a phenomenon that could be called the first step of the historical turn, which is a matter of *turning* toward and emphasising for oneself the philosophical investigation of historical matters. The second step of the turn involves *expressing* and trying most effectively to influence others with what has been found. Here the manner of expression is by

no means incidental, and it is in this context that aesthetic factors and the peculiarities of subjectivity highlighted in Frank's work again appear especially relevant. His historical recovery of the notion of *Selbstgefühl* can help us to see that the uniquely historical focus and mode of expression that philosophy began to take on in the late eighteenth century was no accident. On the contrary, this historical focus was in large part precisely the most appropriate way at hand to do justice to, and replicate, the crucial phenomena of subjectivity and aesthetics that, at that very moment, had become the special province of philosophy (even if not its total field) as it moved (lurching) toward giving up the old dream of being itself a kind of scientific system or an entirely objective moral or religious authority. The last desperate version of that dream was the literally messianic belief (which, I have argued, exceeded Kant's own more modest intentions)²⁹ that Kant's *Critique*, or the foundational system(s) supposedly modelled directly upon it, could allow philosophy finally to reign as an apodictic, complete, and basically ahistorical system, one that could encompass even the latest scientific and political revolutions. This dream began to dissolve when it was realised by Reinhold, and then Hegel and other students of Kantianism in Jena, that a close account needed to be given of why the supposedly self-evident new Critical philosophies were in fact received, even by highly sympathetic readers, as far from truly evident, consistent, or all-encompassing. The fruitful kernel of the Jena response was to insist on investigating the history of philosophical interpretation itself, to show exactly how one's predecessors had misunderstood each other, and then to explain, as a consequence of a philosophical grasp of all these historical complexities and their 'result' in current thought, how there was still a way to indicate a clear improvement on the past and thus an escape from the spectre of relativism after all.

Frank does not himself stress the theme of history in this way, but the extensive historical work that he has done gives us a crucial clue for understanding the remarkably close philosophical relation, especially at this time, between history, aesthetics, and subjectivity. He reminds us that rather than trying to define the notions of subjectivity, aesthetics, and philosophy in a timeless vacuum, we need to explore the details of their intersecting development right at the moment of their taking on their dominant modern form at the end of the eighteenth century. What this implies for our purposes is that we need to realise not only *that* these notions were developed within that same

moment but also to see *how* it was that their prominence fit the historical turn so well that they have properly remained a central part of our increasing concern with the historical as such. To put it another way, if each era of philosophy is, as Alain Badiou has suggested, always a particular systematic way of ‘collecting’ and reacting to its basic ‘conditions’ (he proposes: the mathematical, the poetic, the political, the erotic; a quartet that roughly matches my own except for the intriguing French substitution of the ‘erotic’ for the religious),³⁰ and if (as Badiou also suggests) late modern philosophy is marked by an understanding of itself as ‘architectonic’ but *not scientific* in a literal sense, then we should expect that the revolutionary modern era that is the Critical period is likely to be characterised by a distinctive style (or set of styles) that expresses its collecting of these conditions in a way that remains fundamentally argumentative, and thus distinctively philosophical, while more and more getting over the pretence of being a genuine science—and thus opening the way for an aesthetic approach.

There are all sorts of ways in which this ‘non-scientific’ but still philosophic style of writing *might* have developed, but my hypothesis is that what has *in fact* occurred is this: the distinctive feature of ‘leading’ philosophical writing now—as in late eighteenth century Jena—has become nothing less than an ability to display a ‘full grasp’, that is, a genuinely philosophical appreciation, of the specific *historical* relations between the systems of one’s major predecessors, and of the way that they prefigure one’s own ‘more adequate’ position, where ‘adequate’ needs to be understood in terms that, for want of a better word, are largely aesthetic. At the same time, precisely because this is still a *philosophical* effort, it must be understood as involving an ability to provide a reconstruction of the contours of earlier thought in a way that does *conceptual* justice (or at least energetically attempts to) to its origins and involves studying that thought’s founding *subjectivity*, its motivating feelings, intentions and style.

Originally, Kant’s immediate successor, Reinhold, supposed that this kind of reconstruction would triumph easily through the use of Enlightenment-style analysis (the term ‘*Aufklärung*’ is connected explicitly by Reinhold with analytically ‘clearing up’ matters), while Hegel supposed it might occur through a somewhat more complex, but in principle still evident, process of ‘dialectic’. Over time, however, these suppositions have in effect been supplanted

by the Romantic idea that philosophical 'success' is largely a matter of convincing without the sufficiency of these means, let alone anything like scientific or logical closure. Philosophical achievement thus has become, in large part, a matter of manifesting an argumentatively persuasive *style*, that is a relatively *aesthetic*, rather than a clearly 'demonstrative', superiority over a large range of competitors.³¹ In other words, more and more of the dominant philosophy of our time has come to the point of expressing itself in a series of 'phenomenologies of spirit', in the 'modest' sense noted earlier, where one major figure after the other offers not a 'necessary path of the Idea' but simply a strikingly innovative and more inclusive conceptual narrative, or genealogy, of our cumulative philosophical situation.

It is hard to give a positive *definition* of exactly what makes an approach aesthetic in this sense, but it is appropriate, and I hope sufficient for now, to recall how many prominent examples there are of this approach. Consider the well-known content and form of the work not only of Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Habermas, Frank and Badiou, but now also, in the Anglophone world as well, figures such as Wilfrid Sellars, Thomas Kuhn, John Rawls, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, Stanley Cavell, Robert Brandom and Michael Friedman. These extraordinary philosophers differ in many ways, but they share an evident mastery of the techniques of the historical turn, and it is not a merely incidental feature of their work that it is for the most part aesthetically captivating, and deeply sensitive to subjectivity, even at the core of its conceptual originality.

(To avoid misunderstanding, it should be emphasised that all this is not meant as an argument for concluding that this is the *only* kind of philosophy that is highly significant. The special role of 'master thinkers' of this kind is consistent with, and clearly a needed complement to, the valuable persistence of large tracts of relatively 'non-aesthetic' philosophy that remain woodenly beholden to either a strictly ahistorical or a largely empiricist-historicist method. And yet, even in more analytic circles, the aesthetic factor should not be underestimated in the success of writers such as Moore, Austin, Ryle, Quine, Strawson, Dennett and Davidson. In general, analytic philosophy should not be reduced to any one very limited school, such as positivism, as all too often is still suggested, for example in Badiou.)³²

If we bracket these complications, and allow for now that the general notion of a new historical-aesthetic approach has at least many recognisable instances, how should we evaluate this trend? Ironically, a striking problem with recent narratives of this kind is not that, when read closely, they are too 'grand' or absolute, and hence naively 'pre-postmodern'. The difficulty is rather that, once their subtleties are appreciated, they remain astonishingly self-effacing and may appear to be 'mere interpretations'. Hence, one cannot help but wonder whether the best philosophy now has moved so far beyond—in its first step—focusing on subjectivity, aesthetics, or history merely as themes, that it has begun—in its second step—to treat them as *excessively* central to its own 'method' and style, and so it has moved to the verge of becoming *merely* subjective, merely aesthetic, and merely historical after all. It is no accident that Badiou, for example, has spoken critically of European philosophy from Nietzsche to Heidegger as existing in 'The Age of Poets', an age when philosophy suffers the danger of sacrificing its unique systematic power to the poetic 'suture' that is *only one* of its conditions.³³ In this way the old worry from the initial stage of post-Kantian thought, that philosophy is becoming *too* subjective, aesthetic and historical, re-emerges in our time in an especially virulent and possibly nihilistic form. The recourse to an 'anti-theory' knit-picking particularism, or to a 'mere story' about how one's present position can accommodate and, simply from its own perspective, seem aesthetically to surpass earlier ones could be regarded as basically a failure of nerve. It may reveal a lack of ability in presenting a straightforward theoretical system for our complex world, and a lack of practical confidence in the power to remake the social world in a progressive direction in line with an underlying rational structure. The challenge for genuinely Critical philosophy then becomes one of maintaining the Critical non-relativist and non-historicist systematic vision that Kant's work exemplified, while including an honest but not excessive appreciation for post-Kantian and Romantic insights about the fragmentary and necessarily limited capacities of philosophy and thought in general.

I will end not by suggesting that there is an easy solution to this problem, but by contending that, despite its seriousness, at least some of the most common worries about it are misplaced. The main precondition for appreciating the true nature and value of the best of modern philosophical writing is, I believe, to overcome the tendency, common especially in Anglophone thought,

of having a very narrow and pejorative notion of what is meant by writing that is fundamentally subjective and aesthetic. There are still all sorts of ways in which the terms 'subjective' and 'aesthetic' are used as tantamount to signifying 'triviality', 'arbitrariness', 'subjectivism', 'aestheticism', and so on. There is, however, as Frank's work reminds us, an alternative, a natural and 'deep' sense of 'subjective' that goes together well with a 'broad', but still understandable and very significant, positive sense of 'aesthetic'. As a start, think of the 'subjective' as not the incidental, but as simply the inside aspect of experience in general, our fundamental capacity to have feeling and style at all. And think of the 'aesthetic' not as what is 'artistic' in some very narrow sense, but as simply all the higher intentional and creative developments of subjectivity, considered apart from any privileging of other more easily demarcated projects such as science ('the mathematical'), ethics (including 'the political') or religion. This, of course, is not to deny that all these fields can have their aesthetic aspects too, but the point is that *there* these aspects cannot be fundamental.

Appreciating these deep and broad senses of the notions of the subjective and the aesthetic makes it much easier to link them to the phenomenon of the historical turn in an accurate and positive way. It is clearly the broad sense of the aesthetic that is central to the 'aesthetic turn'. That turn took place not only when the late eighteenth century philosophical field of aesthetics first gained something like its modern autonomous form, but also when aesthetic *life* in a very general sense, and the value of writing as such, was no longer assumed to be subservient to prior scientific, hedonist, moral, political, or religious standards (and thus philosophy came better to understand itself as related to, but *distinct* from, for example, Badiou's 'conditions'). This development can be readily understood as related to the growing appreciation for the deep aspects of subjectivity disclosed in Frank's study of the structure and prominent role of the new notion of *Selbstgefühl*, since to stress *Selbstgefühl*, to stress feeling and style, is precisely to stress the subjective and aesthetic at once. This stress evidently complements the *content* and *form* of philosophy's historical turn. If—and only if—philosophy's distinctive destiny is to be, in large part, a systematic but fundamentally historical form of writing, then it seems only natural that its orientation will not be *simply* objective and non-aesthetic, and that it will take off from and keep circling back to the intricacies of *Selbstgefühl*. More specifically: There is an easily under-

standable reciprocal relation between grasping the distinctive *content* of human conceptual history and taking account of how it is permeated by the depth of *subjectivity*; similarly, the fact that the *form* of the expression of this kind of history cannot be a matter of science, in our now standard mathematical-nomological sense, goes along with the fact that, in some very broad but still understandable sense, it must, if it aims to be (responsibly) successful at all, take on what can be called an *aesthetic* form.

Of course, *if* there were an alternative purely 'objective' ethical, political, religious, or metaphysical system that one could now *expect* to command the respect of all modern readers as such, then the turn toward the subjective and aesthetic could seem very odd, that is, unlikely in fact and questionable in value. At the same time, it must be conceded that there is nothing in the factual 'success' of the historical and aesthetic turns that proves they are beyond philosophical reproach. It could still be true that there is, or will be, an encompassing objective philosophical system, or at least some very important subsections of philosophy,³⁴ that can be laid out for all in a way that largely ignores the complexities of our historical and aesthetic interests (positivism, and then the more sophisticated analytic dream of a 'theory of meaning' were influential and relatively unpromising, but not exhaustive, versions of this thought). In addition, it seems only proper to leave a place right now for arguments showing that specific versions of the aesthetic approach conflict, to their detriment, with evident scientific or ethical considerations.³⁵ For the time being, though, it seems very hard to deny that a leading place in our time is taken by philosophical approaches that combine an outstanding sensitivity to the subjective, the aesthetic and the historical at once—*without* having a commitment to other main traditional interests in a way that goes so deep that it cannot be bracketed. It is true, of course, that philosophers such as Taylor and MacIntyre, for example, connect their philosophies with deeply religious beliefs, and that other philosophers work with a similar overriding interest in all sorts of scientific or political projects. Nonetheless, it seems clear that most of their philosophical readers can and do take over most of their thought while bracketing such commitments, and to that extent what I mean by an 'aesthetic' approach remains dominant. It is not crucial that the philosophers focus on the traditional phenomena of aesthetics as the main content of their work, or that even on reflection they be willing to grant that the main point and form of their own work is primarily 'aesthetic' (even

in a broad sense); the main thing is that its general reception and appreciation rest more on its aesthetic philosophical character than an acceptance of particular demonstrated 'doctrinal' (for example, ethical, religious) elements.

The final and obvious worry for my account is that it rests on stretching the notion of the 'aesthetic' much too far. It is very important for my purposes, however, that this term be permitted to have a very broad and functional meaning, one that requires and allows considerable filling out, with all sorts of concrete contrasts. In particular, it is important to liberate the term from the overly narrow and outdated meaning, still found all too often in Anglophone thought, which consigns it simply to the limited realm of something like 'mere' fine art and recreation. Precisely because I do think it is fair to raise serious questions about the dangers of philosophy's taking too sharp of an 'aesthetic turn', it is important to make clear from the start that the term 'aesthetic' can stand, and has stood, for a very substantive domain, one closely linked, for example, to the deep and general philosophical aspects of subjectivity noted earlier.

In some Continental circles, I fear there is a similar fundamental misunderstanding about the relationship between the aesthetic and the subjective, one that likewise has the effect of underestimating both of them. For a long time, a *leitmotiv* of much work on this topic has been the complaint that Kant's Critical philosophy introduced the notion of an autonomous aesthetic sphere at the cost of reducing it to a 'merely subjective' validity and significance.³⁶ Thus, as I noted at the beginning, ever since Hegel, Heidegger, and others, there has been a repeated attempt³⁷—and then a repeated criticism of the attempt—to rescue a more 'ontological', and supposedly less subjective *because non-Kantian*, dimension of aesthetic value.

There is obviously something very understandable about this reaction (since there no doubt has been a growing 'subjectivisation' of value in general since at least the beginning of the Critical era), but there are also some basic presumptions at work here that seem unnecessary and unfortunate. In particular, largely because of a few complex oddities in Kant's terminology (his speaking of taste as merely 'subjectively' valid, whereas, as I have argued elsewhere, what his own theory implies corresponds most closely to what *we* now understand, in most respects, as a kind of 'objective validity'),³⁸ a very important point has been missed: the fact that philosophers (such as Kant)

may insist on speaking of something as 'subjective' and 'aesthetic' need not at all mean that their prime concern is with what is 'merely subjective' or 'merely aesthetic' in a negative philosophical sense. On the contrary, the whole point of their focusing on the admittedly subjective *dimension* of basic aesthetic experience (and this is especially true of Kant, who is concerned above all with what the aesthetic reveals about our place in nature) can be precisely to disclose something that is *much more* than merely subjective. Moreover, in the 'real world' of aesthetics now, the notion of aesthetic value typically concerns not merely the 'precious' perception that something is tangibly beautiful, or sublime, but also—or much more often—realisations that it is 'interesting', 'arresting', 'surreal', 'authentic', or fits some other fairly 'thick' term. The 'much more', or 'other', of the aesthetic moment can be—as it often is with the Romantics and existentialists—a bare sense of 'being' or 'existence' itself, but it can also be a much more detailed 'objective', that is, general, truth about a deep 'structural' or 'historical' feature of our subjectivity as such. Thus, even if each intense modern aesthetic experience involves a variety of *Selbstgefühl* and understands itself as *taking place essentially within* an individual subject, *what* the experience discloses, when it has genuine 'aesthetic' value, will be very much about what the *world* of 'subjectivity' is like as such, and this is by no means something merely particular and idiosyncratic. Hence it is no wonder that even a politically obsessed thinker such as Adorno could be fascinated by what Beckett reveals about 'how it is' to be an 'immediate' subject in our time, or that Frank has stressed that the main point of most (Jena) Romantic discussions of the self is precisely not to suggest that the mere individual (whether empirical or transcendental) can or should 'posit', control, or escape from the world as such (as in caricatures of Fichtean Idealism). The aim of the leaders of the aesthetic turn, then and now, is rather precisely to indicate ways in which (as Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schlegel, Nietzsche and others express in detail) the self originally *finds itself* 'thrown' by, and thereby disclosing for others, the basic forces of nature, language, culture, and so on.

What all this means is that, at a first approach, it is a mistake to assume genuine Critical philosophy ever needed to be rescued from mere subjectivism³⁹ or mere aestheticism. The 'disease' never existed there, so the 'cure' would have been an overdose from the start. At the same time, it can be admitted that a very strong stress on subjectivity and aesthetics alone (that would leave

out developments in science, metaphysics, and so on) can signal a problem, a weakness, of modernity—even if it is not the kind of *idiosyncratic* problem that is generally assumed. Fortunately, Critical philosophy, and all its major immediate variations, never lost sight of objectivity and the common world as such, and, from the beginning, aimed to use insights about subjectivity and aesthetics to give us a better sense of the full contours of our social and natural life.⁴⁰ The Jena philosophies of nature and art (especially Schelling's) are but one paradigm of this attitude. Whatever their weaknesses, they surely were not aimed at constructing any form of a merely individualistic subjectivism, or a *l'art pour l'art* aesthetics. On the contrary, they were clearly designed, under the influence of Spinoza and Rousseau, as part of what could at the same time be called a kind of 'objective' ontology and ethics, that is, one that would overcome the overly narrow atomistic and mechanistic objective systems of earlier phases of modernity. Similar Critical options and challenges face us today.

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Notes

- ¹ See K. Ameriks, "Hegel's Aesthetics: New Perspectives on its Response to Kant and Romanticism," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 45/46, 2002, pp. 72-92.
- ² See K. Ameriks, "The Legacy of Idealism in the Philosophy of Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. K. Ameriks, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 1-17.
- ³ See Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, University Park, Penn State Press, 1992, especially the first chapters. See also *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, eds. B. Hanssen and A. Benjamin, London, Continuum, 2002 and T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, especially the Kierkegaard chapter (the Kant chapter, p. 101, n. 14, has an unusual footnote chiding me for reading Kant in a 'hostile' manner, although that is the opposite of my intention).
- ⁴ Compare with. D. Henrich, "Was ist Metaphysik—Was ist Moderne? Zwölf Thesen gegen Jürgen Habermas," in *Konzepte: Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1987.
- ⁵ See for example, *Who Comes after the Subject?* eds. E. Cadava, P. Connor, and J.-L. Nancy, London, Routledge, 1991; *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, eds. S. Critchley and

P. Dews, Albany, SUNY Press, 1996 and M. Frank, *What is Neo-Structuralism?* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

- ⁶ See, for example, M. Frank, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1991 and *Analytische Theorien des Selbstbewußtseins*, ed. M. Frank, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1994.
- ⁷ See K. Ameriks, "The Ineliminable Subject: From Kant to Frank," in *The Modern Subject*, eds. K. Ameriks and D. Sturma, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995, pp. 217-30. Compare with A. Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, ed. N. Madarasz, Albany, SUNY Press, 1999, and M. Frank, *The Subject and the Text: Essays on Literary Theory and Philosophy*, ed. A. Bowie, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ⁸ See C. Larmore, "Hölderlin and Novalis," in Ameriks, *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, pp. 141-60; Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. J. Kneller, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003 and M. Frank, 'Unendliche Annäherung': *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1997.
- ⁹ M. Frank, *Selbstgefühl*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2002, especially p. 37.
- ¹⁰ See *ibid.*, especially chapters III and VII-VIII; the new interest in Spinoza (generated by Jacobi's work) was also a large part of this phenomenon.
- ¹¹ See Frank, *The Subject and the Text*, p. 63, "style is that aspect of a work which is irreducibly non-general." Compare with *ibid.*, pp. 79, 92.
- ¹² See Frank, *Selbstgefühl*, p. 33.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 190f.
- ¹⁴ See *ibid.*, *Excurs 3* (on Shoemaker), *Excurs 5* (on Block); on related points in Chisholm and Prauss, Compare with K. Ameriks "Contemporary German Epistemology," *Inquiry*, 25, 1982, pp. 125-38.
- ¹⁵ For one recent overview, see V. Descombes, *The Mind's Provisions: A Critique of Cognitivism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001.
- ¹⁶ See Ulrich Johannes Schneider, "Teaching the History of Philosophy in Nineteenth Century Germany," Princeton Center for the Study of Human Values, 2003, p. 12.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ See K. Ameriks "Reinhold über Systematik, Populärtheit und die 'Historische Wende'," in *Philosophie ohne Beinamen. System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken C.L. Reinholds*, eds. M. Bondeli and A. Lazzari, Basel, Schwalbe Philosophica, 2003, pp. 303-36.
- ¹⁹ This section of the paper grew out of work for a conference on "Teaching New Histories of Philosophy" at the Princeton University Center for Human Values, April 4-6, 2003, and can be compared with the work of others at the conference (see: www.Princeton.edu/values). See especially U.J. Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes. Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1990, and *Philosophie und Universität. Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg,

Felix Meiner, 1999. Compare with T. Ziolkowski, *Clio: The Romantic Muse. The Historicization of the Faculties in Germany*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004, which traces the path that this process takes at the beginning of the nineteenth century in fields such as religion, law, and science as well as philosophy.

²⁰ See above, note 18.

²¹ See also K. Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, and "Text and Context: Hermeneutical Prolegomena to Interpreting a Kant Text," in *Kant verstehen/ Understanding Kant*, eds. D. Schönecker and T. Zwenger, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001, pp. 11-31. On the issue of the interdependence of philosophy and history, I have been directly influenced by—in addition to those cited—writers such as Robert Pippin, Allen Wood, Gary Gutting, Dieter Jähnig, Tzvetan Todorov, Hans Frei and Karsten Harries. Heinrich Heine anticipated (and stimulated) the most influential contemporary attitudes on this topic in his "Nietzsche/Rorty" tract, *The History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (1834).

²² Herder's charm is that he does not do this consistently, and he is occasionally still caught in 'progressivist' (or 'retro') or 'eternal' presumptions of his own. See *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. M. Forster, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²³ Further complications related to this point are explored in Nicholas Boyle's *Erasmus Lectures*, University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming.

²⁴ The theme of a 'modest' systematic philosophy, also touched on by Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, New York, Continuum, 1998, p. 56, is explored in Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, and in the Introduction to K. Ameriks. *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003.

²⁵ Sometimes this is done with the thought that a unified systematic philosophy may be possible after all, for example, as Michael Dummett has suggested, under the heading of a general theory of meaning. Alternatively, it may be done with no metaphilosophical thought, or simply with the idea that it is sufficient for philosophy to be a formal discipline that points out technical infelicities in the arguments of others, or constructs clarifications in new regional disciplines, such as the semantics of natural language, that have not yet settled into the steady path of a 'normal science'. The main error here, I believe, is to keep thinking of philosophy as either a typical science—or else simply a kind of art or 'literature'. The error is understandable because philosophy is like art, since there is a part of it that essentially involves the signature of individual creativity. It is also like science because it essentially involves commitment to intellectual progress. But neither art nor science essentially require a turn to history, whereas there is, I believe, a central strand of philosophy which now realises that, as an unrestricted discipline of universal critical reflection, it cannot avoid focusing on the influence of history as such.

²⁶ In speaking in terms of what we need to be ‘true to’, I am anticipating the notion that doing philosophy can be at once a matter of achieving a form of self-determination (with international as well as individual implications) and of gaining insight into one’s culture and the ‘real world’. (Hence it is not simply a matter of ‘understanding’ a topic but can also be a way of *becoming* one’s ‘true’ self, as when, for example, a contemporary Jew learns Hebrew not as a mere scholarly exercise but as part of a process of identity formation that reveals and realises basic truths that would otherwise lie dormant.) These are not two separate projects, but one complex interconnected enterprise. The project of ‘self-defining’ ourselves now is not a matter of independently legislating a new identity or simply discovering an old one, but is rather an issue of simultaneously appreciating our background and actualising what we see that we can do with it in our current situation. Analogs of this process would be the efforts of poets such as Eliot and Heaney to define their own language and world in terms of a fitting expression of their pre-modern inheritance. Examples of it in philosophy would be the attempts of thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Williams to define themselves, and the best philosophical orientation of our era, in terms of a critical appropriation of the fundamental ideas of ancient non-Socratic thought and practice.

²⁷ My own—largely Kantian—position is not that this historical approach is the only proper path for philosophy, but that it definitely has a special value and should be accepted as at least one of the most important ways of doing philosophy now. It does regard philosophy as one way of overcoming the ‘repressed’, but it does not have to be committed to any particular theory that this repression is conspiratorial or intentional or psychological in any ordinary sense. (Thanks to John Cooper for pressing this point.)

²⁸ That so many intellectuals, from 1800 until now, look for these charges more and more in the history of *philosophy*, and not in literally sacred traditions, is another explanation of where, as Hegel surely knew, *our* ‘higher need’ to turn to history comes from: It is not a merely academic task, but a deeply personal project, one that, for better or worse, obviously has taken on an ever greater intensity to compensate for the decline in the way that standard religious sources appear to be capable of satisfying our historical thirst. In history we can all seek, as believers or non-believers, a ‘higher’ common ground—and as philosophers we can find it even in endless controversy. For recent discussions on these issues I am indebted to my associates at Notre Dame, especially Gary Gutting, Paul Franks, Vittorio Hösle, Lynn Joy, Fred Rush Jr., Philip Quinn, Hindy Najman, Mathias Thierbach, James Turner, and Anja Jauernig, as well as to discussants at meetings in Princeton, Munich and Lucerne.

²⁹ See above, note 24.

- ³⁰ See Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, London, Verso, 2001.
- ³¹ There are dangers here, as Badiou has noted in his discussions of rhetoric and sophistry. Also, compare with the perplexity expressed about the reputation of Bernard Williams, who, quite properly, was immensely respected ‘despite’ not having a ‘theory’, in Colin McGinn, “Isn’t it the Truth?,” *New York Review of Books*, 50, April 10, 2003 p. 70: “his influence lies more in the style . . .”
- ³² For example, Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, p. 42.
- ³³ Badiou, *Manifesto*, pp. 69-77.
- ³⁴ In my own work, I am most concerned with a hybrid of these two, a kind of modest Kantianism that would be relatively, but not completely, ahistorical in comparison to the perhaps more interesting but also more questionable radical post-Kantian practitioners of the historical turn. See above, note 21 and note 27.
- ³⁵ On the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical, see Alexander Nehamas, “The Art of Being Unselfish,” *Daedalus*, Fall 2002, pp. 57-68.
- ³⁶ See for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1975, esp. Part One.
- ³⁷ See above, note 1, a discussion of Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.
- ³⁸ See Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, part III.
- ³⁹ Compare with K. Ameriks “On Beiser’s ‘German Idealism’,” *Inquiry*, 47, 2004.
- ⁴⁰ See F. Beiser, *German Idealism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002.

Manfred Frank

Fragments of a History of the Theory of Self-Consciousness from Kant to Kierkegaard

ABSTRACT

In the development of modern philosophy self-consciousness was not generally or unanimously given important consideration. This was because philosophers such as Descartes, Kant and Fichte thought it served as the highest principle from which we can 'deduce' all propositions that rightly claimed validity. However, the Romantics thought that the consideration of self-consciousness was of the highest importance even when any claim to foundationalism was abandoned. In this respect, Hölderlin and his circle, as well as Novalis and Schleiermacher, thought that self-consciousness, itself, was not a principle but must be ranked on a minor or dependent level, and presupposed the Absolute as a superior but inaccessible condition or ground. This reservation did not hinder them from recognising that the foundationalist Fichte was the first to have shown conclusively that from Descartes, via German Rationalism and British Empiricism, up to Kant, self-consciousness was misconceived of as the result of an act of reflection by which a second-order act bent back upon a first-order act that is identical to itself. This conception entailed circular entanglements and infinite regresses, and was too high a price to pay. Whereas Fichte thought pre-reflexive self-awareness was a philosophical principle, the Romantics and their vehement critic Kierkegaard, abandoned the idea of self-consciousness as a foundational starting point of philosophy. Instead, they founded self-consciousness on transcendent Being, a prior non-conceptual consciousness ('feeling') and reproached Fichte for having fallen back into the repudiated reflection model of self-consciousness.

KEYWORDS: Self-consciousness, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin, Sinclair, Herbart, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard

If one were asked to specify the lowest common denominator of modern philosophy from Descartes to Sartre, it would not take much time to decide on the reply: this common denominator is self-consciousness. Not only did Descartes rely on self-consciousness to guarantee ultimate certainty in the form of the *fundamentum inconcussum* for an epistemic self-orientation threatened by doubt; he also considered it to be a principle of deduction for all potentially true propositions. Leibniz followed him in this respect. David Hume was prevented by his empiricist premises (which only allow isolated sense experiences and the reflection on them as sources of knowledge) from recognising a self-consciousness which could remain identical with itself over time. However, in the appendix to his major work, he confessed that in this domain he was not only uncertain, but perplexed. The connectedness of the 'bundles of perception' required a unitary self-consciousness, which he could only reject on the basis of his own principles. "All my hopes vanish," he admitted,

[. . .] when I proceed to explain the principle of connexion, which binds them [sc. the successive perceptions as distinct existences] together, and makes us attribute to them real simplicity and identity; I am sensible, that my account is very defective, and that nothing but the seeming evidence of the precedent reasonings cou'd have induc'd me to receive it. [. . .] / [. . . In fact,] I cannot discover any theory, which gives me satisfaction on this head.

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences* [. . .].

For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions.¹

This was Kant's achievement. Like Descartes and Leibniz before him, he treated the knowledge possessed by conscious beings, not only of their mental states, but of the coherence of these states in the unity of conscious life, as a principle of deduction for all true propositions—in Kant's terminology,

'Judgements'. He also undertook to derive the thought of possible objectivity from the application of this principle to sense experience. Like Descartes, Kant was so preoccupied with the foundational function which he attributed to the 'I' in his philosophy that he never really paid attention to the structure of this principle itself. To his surprise, this was to become a chief pre-occupation of his pupils and successors. And that will be the topic of the following discussion.

I

Kant described self-consciousness as the "highest point" of (theoretical) philosophy: "all employment of the understanding, even the whole of logic, and transcendental philosophy," depend on it.² A little later, Kant presents it again, this time in the traditional form borrowed from Leibniz as the "unity of apperception . . . which is the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge."³

Kant was by no means alone in this unbending belief that the consciousness which thinking beings have of themselves is apt to serve as the highest principle of philosophy. Rather, he stands in the history of a tradition, whose great figures are Descartes, Leibniz, and Rousseau. Kant was perfectly aware of this. His originality is not to be found here, but in the *function* which he attributes to the principle of self-consciousness with regard to the explanation of the objectivity of our representations. For Kant, speculation about the nature of the self was in no sense an end in itself (as it was later to be, in a certain sense, for Fichte and the early romantics). He was rather concerned with drawing wide-ranging conclusions from a certain characteristic of the 'I think' which is known to itself with Cartesian self-evidence: this feature is its identity. Identity is, of course, something different from analytical unity. The latter term indicates that property of the 'I' which is a common characteristic of all representations accompanied by the 'I' (namely, that they all have the same feature of being able to be accompanied by the one, constant 'I think'). 'Identity' (Kant also says 'synthetic unity'), however, indicates the property of the 'I' by virtue of which it can not only be connected transversally, as it were, to all representations, as in the previous use, but also links these representations together horizontally.⁴ To achieve this, a finite set of rules is required for connecting the individual representations: these are the

categories. Categories are predicates with such a wide extension that something cannot both be an object, and not be determined by them. In other words, categories are predicates of objects in general. When attributed to complexes of intuitions, they can be seen as constituting condensed judgements, and there will be as many of them as there are forms of judgement.

Kant derived this idea from the Savoyard vicar, at the beginning of Book IV of Rousseau's *Emile*.⁵ The basic idea can be sketched rapidly. While I feel myself to be passive as a sensible being, I experience myself as active insofar as I think. Thinking is judging. In the act of judgement, different representations deriving from various viewpoints are grasped as a unity, and this unity is recognised through the veritative 'is', common to all statements. Whoever uses the word 'is' meaningfully in relation to representations connects them together through a common feature: their concept, which captures what is common to them. If this concept is applied to something which exists—that is, if the judgement concerning the underlying state of affairs is right—then this something is constituted as an object. Its objectivity consists in, and can be proved by, the fact that, at any time, it can be translated into a set of true judgements. Thus, the objectivity of the individual things is a function of the truth of judgements concerning states of affairs.⁶ At the origin of objectivity there stands the identity of the 'I', which is operative in the 'is' of judgement.⁷

In this way—Kant merely presented the argument in more detail—there arises an indissoluble connection between the identity of the 'I', truth (as a property of statements), and objectivity (as a property of representations). To demonstrate the necessary character of this connection with the requisite precision was the sole ambition of Kant's 'transcendental deduction of the categories'. The principle of this deduction, the 'I' itself, was important to Kant only because of its—admittedly indispensable—function *as* a principle; in other words, because of the consequences that arise for the explication of the ground of objectivity. It seems to have been one of the greatest surprises Kant ever received that his pupils began to argue, above all, about the structure of this 'I', and strove to demonstrate that Kant's philosophy failed to provide an adequate description of it.

If this objection were sound, it would be a serious one. For it concerns nothing less than what Kant himself described as the 'highest point' of his philosophy. If the self-evidence of this 'highest point' were put in question, then

the transcendental deduction—which was itself never questioned by the Kantians—would lose its demonstrative force. The objection in fact runs as follows: entirely absorbed in this task of a deduction of the categories (as valid for *all* appearances), Kant neglected to show the self-evident character of his highest principle; indeed, he was obliged to deny that it could be known.

This is because—according to Kant’s own directives for the use of the word ‘knowledge’ (*Erkenntnis*)—only objects can be known. Objectivity is the result of the intervention of the unity of the self into the chaotic manifold which is delivered to us by the senses. This intervention occurs through the categories that allow me to move from one representation to another, according to rules that have *a priori* evidence, so that everything representable fits together into a continuous conception of the world. A manifold of intuition determined by the categories is precisely what Kant terms ‘cognition’. It is obvious, however, that the *principle* in whose name this determination takes place, namely pure self-consciousness, cannot become an object of knowledge, because it is not sensible. Kant, not without some embarrassment, terms it “an intellectual representation of the spontaneity of a thinking subject.”⁸ Conversely, only what can be cognised can claim to be an object, that is, a secured item of extant knowledge (component of our conception of the world). In fact, Kant does speak of the *objective* unity of the ‘I’.⁹ Since, at the same time, he denies the possibility of an ‘intellectual intuition’ (this would be a synthesis of the understanding in which the intuitional content would be not only unified, but produced), the question arises of how self-consciousness can be given the status of an objective existent.

In other words: insofar as only the act of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) can give one objective knowledge (*Wissen*), the pure ‘I’ cannot be known as an objective existent. As soon as this conclusion is accepted, however, it is clear that it has disastrous consequences for the self-evidence of the highest point of theoretical philosophy.

Kant draws a strict distinction between the *being* (*Sein*) of self-consciousness and its *appearance to itself* (*Sich-Erscheinen*) in time. The latter is only thinkable as an empirical fact (and therefore as an object of knowledge). By contrast, the former, the naked being of the self, as a condition of possibility of its self-appearance, remains a mere presupposition.¹⁰ What is presupposed in this way is an existent bereft of any property or quality;¹¹ all I know about

it is “that it is” not: “what it is” or “how it appears to itself.”¹² All I grasp of it is the *actus purus* of its naked being.¹³ Since every appearance of the ‘I’ has its being as a presupposition, one might say that its existence precedes its essence. Only the appearance—the essence—is accessible to knowledge. Kant remarks, in this context, that the ‘I’ only has access to its being via predicates through which it both determines itself and disguises its being.¹⁴ This being itself, which is pre-predicative and pre-categorical (thus, non-propositional, since categories are condensed propositional forms), is inaccessible to knowledge. And yet there must be a consciousness of it, if the ‘highest point of philosophy’ is not to lose its self-evidence. It might be objected that talk of the ‘being of consciousness’ (in contrast to its self-appearing) refers only to its *mode* of being, and thus to one of its qualitative determinations, much in the same way as does the formulation “I exist as intelligence,”¹⁵ which does not mean that intelligence, above and beyond the fact of appearing as intelligence, also has a subsistent being external to this determination.¹⁶ And yet it is transphenomenal *existence*—which alone could be described in a radical sense as ‘naked’ or featureless—with which Kant is concerned.

Fortunately, to demonstrate this, I can refer to a short, but highly significant note which Kant added to the second edition of the chapter on the paralogisms.¹⁷ Firstly, Kant here distinguishes clearly, as he does elsewhere in this context, between the *existence* expressed by Descartes’ statement *Cogito sum*, and concepts such as ‘reality’ (*Realität*) and ‘being’ (*Dasein*). These latter concepts refer to two different types of categories, those of *quality* and those of *modality*. Furthermore they require completion through an intentional content, and are therefore not suitable for characterising the essence of the purely determining ‘I’. Secondly, Kant distinguishes the bare existence of the pure ‘I’ from any actual relation to sensation, which is provided by the being of (sensible) objects. Under these circumstances, what mode of consciousness could correspond to the pure being of self-consciousness? Certainly not intuition, for intuition is directed towards the sensible world, and the being of the pure ‘I’ bears no trace of the sensible. But neither can it be thought, since thinking is never immediate, but reaches its object by means of a concept, an analytically isolated characteristic which this object has in common with many others.¹⁸ The existence grasped in pure apperception therefore cannot be accounted for in either the sensible or the conceptual components of our faculty of cognition (*Erkenntnisvermögen*). It is definitively situated this side of

the threshold beyond which the distinction between the intuitional and the conceptual becomes possible, and takes place. Kant suggests that this existence in pure apperception corresponds to a weird construction, “an indeterminate empirical intuition or perception,”¹⁹ which he had earlier qualified as “inner experience” or “inner perception.”²⁰ This inner and yet empirical perception is entirely distinct from, and has nothing to do with, what Kant, in other contexts, calls “inner perception,” where the term is synonymous with the “inner sense,” through which sensuous appearances of the (empirical) ‘I’ are experienced.²¹ This can be easily demonstrated by the fact that Kant characterises this inner self-perception or self-intuition as “purely intellectual.” He adds that it bears in itself the source of a “pure spontaneity,”²² which the empirical ‘I’ obviously lacks, but which also includes *existence*. Regarding this, Kant remarks that it is given to apperception [as] something real, and indeed for thought in general, thus not as appearance.²³

In Kant’s view it is clear that pure apperception includes the immediate consciousness of its own existence, and that this consciousness, although pre-intuitional, nonetheless includes the perception of an existent. This is because existence cannot be attained by thought alone; it must be *given* if there is to be consciousness of it. I pass over a lot of parallel quotations, because Kant’s problem, though enigmatic in its matter, is clearly posed in its terms. As Kant himself states:

The ‘I think’ is . . . an empirical proposition, and contains in itself the proposition, ‘I exist’ . . . [It] expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition i.e. perception (thus shows that sensation, which as such belongs to sensibility, lies at the basis of this existential proposition) but the ‘I think’ precedes the experience, which is required to determine the object of perception through categories with respect to time; and the existence here is not a category.²⁴

This experiential aspect, however, does not affect the fact that the sensation here referred to precedes the sort of experience through which our intuitional faculty receives sensuous material from outside, and passes it on to the understanding to do the categorical work. The existence of the pure *cogito* is neither intuition nor category. It is epistemically classified as an ‘inner perception’, which must be strictly distinguished from the perception of psychic objectivities, as these appear to ‘inner sense’. In the *Metaphysical Principles of Natural Science*, Kant notes in the same way:

Since the thought 'I' is in no sense a concept, but only inner perception, nothing can be deduced from it (except the utter difference of an object of inner sense from what we think of as an object of outer sense), and consequently not the continuous existence of the soul as substance.²⁵

In order to grasp the peculiar aporia of Kant's basic argument, it is worth examining Kant's conviction that "Existence (Being) is not a real predicate."²⁶ The property of reality constitutes one of the three sub-divisions of the category of quality; one of the qualities of the object concerned is judged by means of it, its *realitas*, its thinghood or mode of being.²⁷ 'Existence is not a real predicate' means then: existential judgements provide no judgement concerning the mode of being (*qualitas, realitas, quidditas*): being is not a property in this sense. If I say 'I exist as intelligence', then intelligence is a real predicate that belongs to the quality of the *cogito*, and the judgement itself is analytic.²⁸ Whether such a *cogito* also exists (beyond its being-thought-of), independently of its property as thinking, is left undetermined. And yet according to Kant the proposition *cogito* implies the empirical state of affairs, 'I exist'. The question is: in virtue of what does the claim of the existential judgement exceed the claim of the judgement about reality? Answer: in that existential judgements depend on sense-experience, where the latter judgements don't.

In a short text dating from 1763, *The Only Possible Ground for a Proof of the Existence of God*, Kant first presented in a systematic form his thesis that the indefinite verbal expression, 'to be', has two different meanings. Kant argues here that 'being' (*Sein*) is the object of a relative positing, whereas 'existence' (*Dasein*) is the result of an absolute positing. The positing of something is relative when this something is posited in relation to (relative to) something else, for example, in the statement 'a is B'. Here 'a' is only posited in relation to its 'being B', but not absolutely. This is the type of positing which is operative in the statement, 'I am as intelligence'. By contrast, the positing of 'a' would be absolute, if it were in relation not to 'B', but to 'a' itself. In this case, as Kant says, 'existence' (*Dasein*) is attributed to 'a'.²⁹ If I say 'this a exists', then I do not refer to anything else, or to any determination of 'a'; rather, I posit 'a' as existing, independently of any relation. Relative and absolute positing thus occur in the form of a judgement. Usually judgements link together different classes of representations. In the simple singular state-

ment, a content of intuition is linked with a concept ('a is B'); both—in Kant's terminology—are real determinations. In the judgement 'a exists', by contrast, no concept is imposed upon the intuitional content, but rather being is attributed to the thing concerned. It is posited as such, without any additional characterisation. This attribution of existence, which oversteps the purely conceptual determination of the thing, requires sense-perception. Indeed, only sense experience can convince me or dissuade me whether a concept has an existing content, or whether I am merely thinking it. According to Kant, the categories of modality (under which existence falls) "have the peculiar feature that they in no way enlarge the concept to which they are added as predicates, but merely express its relation to our faculty of cognition."³⁰

Now once more according to Kant, sense-perception is the *exclusive* character of existence (*Wirklichkeit*). The aporetic result is: our knowledge of the existence of the 'I' must somehow rely on perception. And that's exactly what Kant is asserting. In more detail: *Dasein*, *Wirklichkeit*, and *Existenz* (terms which Kant usually employs synonymously), merely bear on "the question whether such a thing is so given to us, that the perception of it can, in all cases, precede the concept. For the fact that the concept precedes the perception signifies the concept's mere possibility; the perception, however, which delivers the material content to the concept, provides the exclusive character of existence."³¹ If this is so, then the mark of being absolutely posited coincides with that of being experienced through the senses (only in this way can our cognitive faculties take up material which derives from a source that is independent of them).

I do not intend, in this context, to investigate the problematic and ambiguous character of this thesis. I am only concerned to make clear the reasons which motivated Kant to correlate the existential judgement 'I am'—in which, what is judged, is *pure*, not empirical, apperception—with an 'indeterminate, empirical intuition, or perception' (and thereby with 'sensation'). The only way in which consciousness can make contact with existence is through that specification of intuition which Kant calls 'sensation' (*Empfindung*). Only sensation can testify to the absolute positing of the cogito. If this is the case—and Kant's premises exclude any other explanation—then there must be an element of intuition correlated with the auto-perception (or: ad-perception) of the *cogito*, its pure spontaneity notwithstanding. In other words, Kant

cannot avoid bringing into play a possibility that he passionately rejects—the possibility of an *intellectual intuition*.³² It is a question of *intuition* here, because only ‘receptivity’, as opposed to the ‘spontaneity’ of intelligence, could testify to existence (absolute positing). The intuition is at the same time *intellectual*, because it is grounded in the pure spontaneity of the understanding and brings with it the idea of a complete determination. Thus, the pure ‘I’ exists, and we have an immediate (in other words, preconceptual and also prereflexive) awareness of it.³³ In other words: in order to justify the *existence* and at the same time the *Cartesian* transparency of the *cogito*, Kant has to admit an *intellectual intuition* as a fact of our conscious life.

Obviously, this is a conclusion that stands in an irresolvable contradiction to Kant’s conviction that the two sources of our cognitive faculty, intellect and sensibility, are entirely independent of one another. For Kant, the thought that I think is entirely free of any element of intuition, while “intuition in no way requires the function of thought”;³⁴ “for without any function of the understanding appearances can be given to us.”³⁵ Furthermore, in other contexts, Kant stubbornly opposed the possibility of *immediate* self-apperception (in this he follows Leibniz, who renders ‘*aperception*’ as ‘*réflexion*’, for example in his *Principles of Nature and of Grace*). “The transcendental I,” says Kant in a famous passage, “is a completely empty representation, which is only known through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of which, in itself, we can never have the slightest concept . . . but can only revolve in a perceptual circle, since any judgement upon it has already made use of its representation.”³⁶

Thus, the prepredicative *being* of pure apperception remains unelucidated; or rather, since we cannot renounce it, we have no other recourse than always to pre-suppose it.³⁷ A corresponding formulation in the A-Version of the chapter on the paralogsms had already indicated this:

Henceforth we can no longer derive [the concept of a substantially enduring self] from [the mere concept of the identical self], since this concept constantly revolves around itself, and brings us no further in any question concerning synthetic knowledge [. . .]. When I strive to observe the pure ‘I’ amidst the changing representations, I have no other basis for my comparisons than once again myself, with the general conditions of my consciousness. Consequently, I can only give tautological answers to all questions, by attribut-

ing to the properties which belong to myself qua object the concept of myself and of my unity, and thereby presupposing what I wanted to make known.³⁸

In other words, if I want to explain who I am, I must declare certain perceivable qualities to be mine. But as soon as I consider the legitimacy of this self-attribution, it obtains that I can only undertake it if I was already familiar with the meaning of 'I' or 'mine'. Thus, I find myself compelled to take myself (or the concept 'I') as the point of comparison which is to enlighten me as to what property defines me, and in this way I presupposes what I was supposed to learn through experience. So, the explanation, Kant suggests, is a completely circular one.

But the 'highest point of philosophy' can scarcely be admitted to be an unfounded *presupposition*—in another context Kant suggests that it could be called 'the subreption of hypostatized consciousness'—even less its description by means of a *circulus vitiosus*. And yet the description which Kant himself gave of his principle bears the unmistakable structure of such a circle. It refers back—perhaps against the original intentions of its author—to the untenable reflection model of self-consciousness, which always presupposes that which it is to demonstrate, and which stands at the centre of the Fichtean critique of Kant.

One must bear in mind that Kant's aporia has two dimensions, which are closely related, and yet distinguishable: one epistemological, and the other ontological. In the first instance, the issue is that of how a pure, non-objective subject of consciousness can acquire knowledge of itself, without objectifying itself (which would presuppose, in a circular manner, that the self-objectifying process is precisely that of a *subject*).³⁹ In the second instance, the question raised is how a pure, and thus non-sensible spontaneity can acquire a consciousness of its own being, given that—by definition—being can only be authenticated by sensation. It appears that both problems can, and must, be solved at the same time.

To my knowledge, there is only one single remark in the rest of Kant's work that unambiguously shows that he was aware of the dimension and of the dual nature of this problem-syndrome. I am referring to a posthumous reflection,⁴⁰ which relates to practical rather than theoretical philosophy. Indeed, the need to account for the intelligibility of the principle of practical philosophy, on the one hand, and its existence, on the other, runs up against the

same problems which we have already encountered with respect to the principle of theoretical philosophy. The principle is freedom, and both its intelligibility⁴¹ and its reality are in question ('reality' means 'existence' in this context; Kant's terminology is not entirely consistent). I will attempt to reconstruct the general context within which this set of problems appears.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant is concerned to show that the objective validity and universality of the moral law cannot be the outcome of an individual empirical maxim of only regional applicability. Here I shall pass over the various formulations which Kant gives of the categorical imperative ('categorical' here meaning 'unconditionally valid'), and consider only the fundamental idea, which justifies the supra personal and general character of commandments. The principle of morality is applied in such a way that all those norms, which cannot be agreed upon by those affected by them, must be excluded as invalid. The principle that intervenes, in order to make a general agreement possible, must thus ensure that only those norms that correspond to a universal will have validity. The categorical imperative can be understood as a principle that demands the strict universalisability of all actions and the maxims that prime them. In this way, all norms that contradict this requirement can be excluded. Kant has in mind those internal contradictions that arise in the maxim of an agent, when he or she attempts to reach a goal with means that are incompatible with the universalisation of his or her behaviour.⁴²

It is astonishing for the reader who only knows the first Critique that Kant grounds the universal will prescribed by the categorical imperative on a 'fact of reason', for which he claims *a priori* evidence.⁴³ For in fact only theoretical reason is endowed with *a priori* valid, and thus universal and objective, concepts. In contrast to the categories which ground the objectivity of knowledge, a categorical imperative only prescribes an 'ought', and cannot be demonstrated in the form of knowledge that can be checked against empirical facts. In other words, it is part of the structure of practical reason, that, despite its objectivity, its claims to validity can only be raised counterfactually, and this in contradiction to empirical reality, which can never be adequate to it.

We are confronted here with an aporetic structure that is analogous to that of the *cogito* as principle of theoretical reason. No knowledge can be adequate

to this principle either, for then it would collapse into the sphere of the sensible. On the other hand, neither the theoretical nor the practical principle can be inaccessible to any knowledge whatever, since in this case they would be unintelligible. Neither can existence be denied them, for then there would be no such principle.

Once again, I can use Kant's own formulations to show that he was aware of the extent of this problem. Although Kant categorically denies to pure apperception the status of an intellectual intuition in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he does at least consider this status for freedom. Kant argues that practical reason guarantees the *reality* of a supersensible object, namely freedom.⁴⁴ However, this reality (once more in the sense of existence) cannot be that of an empirical object in space and time, since it is supersensible. On the other hand, freedom cannot be merely required, it must really exist, if I am to make the least moral demand on my fellow human beings. We find ourselves in a situation which is comparable theoretically to that in which we were placed by the remark on page 422/23 of the B version of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: we must explain the *existence* of a precategorical and supersensible entity, which functions as the principle of that which has the character of an appearance in the 'I', and is accessible to knowledge.⁴⁵ Only the intellectual intuition could have access to such a 'supersensible reality', which definitely remains this side of the threshold beyond which the sphere of possible cognition begins. In the posthumous *Reflexion* to which I have already referred, Kant—at an early date—had already stated this conclusion:

We cannot establish the existence/actuality of freedom on the basis of experience. But we nevertheless have a concept of it throughout intellectual inner intuition (not inner sense) of our activity, which can be initiated through *motiva intellectualia*, and through which practical laws and rules of the good will itself are possible for us. This freedom is a necessary practical presupposition. Neither does it contradict theoretical reason. For, as appearances, our actions are always in the field of experience, while as objective data they are in the field of reason and are approved or disapproved of. Sensibility is under the laws of the understanding and departs [*manuscript ends*].⁴⁶

Similarly—although now in a more problematised formulation—this conclusion can be found in the note to paragraph 7 of the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

The consciousness of this fundamental law may be called a fact of reason, since one cannot ferret it out from antecedent data of reason, such as the consciousness of freedom (for this is not antecedently given), and since it forces itself upon us as a synthetic proposition *a priori* based on no pure or empirical intuition. It would be analytic if the freedom of the will was presupposed, but for this, as a positive concept, an *intellectual intuition* would be needed, and here we cannot assume it. Nevertheless, in order to regard these laws as *given*, and to avoid misconstruing them, it must be stressed that what announces itself to be originally legislative (*sic volo, sic iubeo*), is nothing empirical, but the sole fact of pure reason.⁴⁷

Towards the end of the second version of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had already given some indications of the connection between the being of the pure spontaneity of the 'I', which precedes all appearances, and the subject of freedom.⁴⁸ Without setting off along this path, Kant considers carefully the possible discovery

of a spontaneity [. . .] through which our reality would be determinable, without requiring the conditions of empirical intuition. And hence we would become aware, that there is something contained *a priori* in the consciousness of our existence, which can serve to determine our existence (the complete determination of which is possible only in sensible terms) as being related, by dint of a certain inner faculty, to an intelligible world (which is of course only thought).⁴⁹

Here it would be a matter of a self-determination of the 'I' of such a kind that the appearing 'I' or the will would receive its instructions from the purely intellectual 'I'.⁵⁰ However this may be, the mere assumption of a purely intellectual and determining 'I' requires recourse to intellectual intuition (which alone makes possible an *immediate* acquaintance with the subject and is able to attain its *being*), and which in one stroke secures the intelligibility of the principles of theoretical and practical philosophy by referring both back to this act. It is in just this way that Fichte will conceptualise what he terms the 'absolute I'.

II

Before I turn to Fichte's revolutionary theories of self-consciousness and his departure from Kant, I will first look at some of the traditional rationalist

and empiricist approaches to self-consciousness that led to Kant's explanatory model. Following on from Fichte, I will then attempt to give an outline of romantic theories of self-consciousness that build on Fichte and will end with a glance at Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard.

Naturally, Fichte's point of departure is Kant, although his attitude to Kant is critical. We have seen that Kant was so absorbed in the task of deducing the thought of objectivity from the identity of consciousness that he paid hardly any attention to the internal structure of his deductive principle, namely self-consciousness. Even the question of how the self acquires epistemic access to itself generates great difficulties for him. He must deny the self the status of a possible object of cognition, because the term 'cognition' (*Erkenntnis*) is reserved by him to those operations in which the intellectual enters into synthesis with the sensible. At the same time he indicates the circle which arises from the fact that, in order to grasp itself reflexively, the Ego must always already have been acquainted with its own objectivity prior to any self-conception. And that way self-awareness turns out to be a mere presupposition—which it can't be if its existence is to be guaranteed.

However, we were forced to conclude that, should this implication prove to be unavoidable, then the 'highest point' of Kantian philosophy would collapse. Indeed, Kant never questioned the Cartesian self-evidence of the *cogito*, even though his metaphors are more cautious than those of Descartes. If this self-evidence is acknowledged, and if the existence of the phenomenon is thereby guaranteed, then the error must be with the explanatory model that is employed to make it comprehensible. (A phenomenon can either exist or not exist, but it cannot be true or false: truth and falsehood are properties of statements, thus elements of theory).

Despite this, the explanatory model employed by Kant derives from an honourable tradition. Let's call it the 'representation model of consciousness'. This model assumes that (apart from a few intransitive states such as pain) consciousness is always the representation of an object, which—to retain the image of the German '*Vor-stellung*'—is placed before the eyes of the subject of consciousness, as it were, standing over against it. Every (or rather: almost every) consciousness, Husserl will later assert, is consciousness of something (which is transcendent to consciousness). Thus the relation of being conscious is divided into a subject-pole and an object-pole of representation.

Every representation requires someone who represents, and something that is represented (in the revolutionary year 1789, Reinhold developed from this structural feature the conception of an entirely “New Theory of our Faculty of Representation”).⁵¹ Leibniz seems to have been the first to have referred to the subject of this representation with the nominalised form “*ce moy*.”⁵² With this step the subject of consciousness is identified as the same ‘I’ of which Kant and Fichte will speak. It appears as soon as the place of the object of representation is occupied by the objectified representing agency itself: as soon as the subject of representation re-presents itself, rather than something else.

Once again, it is Leibniz who takes the first step when he defines the subject or the ‘I’ of consciousness as the result of a “*connaissance réflexive de cet état intérieur*.”⁵³ Kant, who always equated ‘I’-hood (or egoity) with the self-reflexivity of representation, took over this definition, and also the term which Leibniz provided for it: ‘Apperception’. This borrowing may have been mediated by C.A. Crusius, who spoke of (self-) consciousness as a representation of representations.⁵⁴ Kant noted in a reflexion dating from 1769: “in fact the representation of all things is the representation of our own state.”⁵⁵ Or: “Consciousness is a knowledge of what comes before me. It is a representation of my representations, it is a self-perception.”⁵⁶

Thus, Kant’s circular definition of the nature of the transcendental ‘I’ summarises a whole tradition. Let’s give it the label *reflection-model of self-consciousness*. Its essential feature is that it interprets the consciousness that we have of ourselves on the model of representation: as the result of a turning-back of a representation onto itself, which transforms the representation in question into an object. Every reflection occurs between two distinct terms; its paradoxical character consists in the fact that it must then deny this difference, otherwise the goal reached by my turning back on myself would be something, or someone, else.

Lack of time permits me only to illustrate the mechanisms of this model by casting two spotlights on the work of two important precursors of German Idealism, Descartes and Leibniz. In addition, I will cast a glance at the use of the same model in Anglo-Saxon empiricism.

Descartes describes the *cogito* as a self-reaction that arises between thinking in general and a specific form of thinking.⁵⁷ Thinking splits into an indiffer-

ent and general consciousness, on the one hand, and a more closely specified consciousness on the other: for example, as willing, perceiving, loving, comprehending, acting. However, these two (as “*pensée déterminée d’une certaine manière*”) sides of thinking are indissolubly connected: a doubt could never arise without being supported by a consciousness in general, which takes cognisance of it by means of that “*témoignage intérieur*.”⁵⁸ The converse is also true: in order to doubt, to love, to think, and so on, thought-in-general must specify itself. Thus, doubt—taken simply as an example of a specific form of thought (“*penser d’une certaine manière*”)—would be one mode of being amongst others in which thought-in-general presents itself; of course, it is only in relation of the latter that the various modes of thought acquire their peculiar certainty: although I can doubt my love, I cannot doubt the immediate consciousness which I have of it. The relation is a classic example of the structure of reflection; and thus it has been handed down to us in Burman’s notes of his conversation with Descartes:

*Conscium esse est quiddam cogitare et reflectere supra suam cogitationem.*⁵⁹

Elsewhere Descartes speaks of the ‘idea’ of the *cogito* as that “*qui me représente à moi-même*.”⁶⁰ Here we have a reflection—an auto-representation of thinking—whose structure presupposes the identity of the two moments, but cannot ground it.⁶¹

This aporia becomes even more acute when one passes from Descartes’ work to that of Leibniz. Leibniz distinguishes, even more explicitly than his predecessor, “*entre la perception qui est un état intérieur [mais souvent insensible] de la Monade représentant les choses externes, et l’Aperception, qui est la Conscience ou la connaissance réflexive de cet état intérieur*.”⁶² It is these “*actes réflexifs*” he explains, “*qui nous font penser à ce qui s’appelle moi, et à considérer que ceci ou cela est en nous*.”⁶³

Thus the problem arises from the difficulty of explaining how a perception that is described as ‘insensible’ can become conscious (‘perceptible’, ‘sensible’) by virtue of its being reflected (“*dès qu’on s’aperçoit de ses perceptions*”) if a consciousness of it (although not one based on apperception) did not already exist.⁶⁴ In other words, if I had to wait for the light of reflection, in order to know that I had just perceived something, then I would never perceive anything at all. For either I am perceiving, in which case there can be no question

of unconsciousness, or I am not perceiving, in which case 'unconsciousness' means simply that the corresponding act has simply not taken place. (Reflection can only discover what was already there: if it finds consciousness, then the reflected act cannot have been unconscious). Leibniz is of course correct when he remarks that I do not need to pay reflexive attention to my perception in order to perceive. But the reason for this is that perception is conscious in itself and does not need a second, accompanying act to be imposed on it, in order to acquire this consciousness. When there is consciousness, it is immediate; of course acts of reflection can connect up mediately with this immediate consciousness and raise it to the level of knowledge. However, what is originally presented is consciousness itself, which is clearly single and does not appear as the object-pole of a subject of consciousness directed towards it.

In broad outline, this was the situation that confronted Kant in his own attempts to clarify the phenomenon of self-consciousness insofar as his gaze was directed towards the predominantly rationalistic tradition of continental Europe. The empirical tradition (above all in Scotland and England) was no less productive for our theme. But as this tradition only admitted individual sensations as sources of knowledge and considered each of those to be temporally and numerically distinct, the problem of the unity of consciousness over time was posed with particular acuteness. (The combining of singular perceptions into 'bundles of perceptions' is carried out in Hume by the imagination—thus objects, as syntheses of perceptions, are unfounded, literally 'imaginary' constructs—and thus his theory becomes entangled in the performative contradiction of its own validity/objectivity.) Hume claimed only ever to stumble on particular perceptions, and never on someone who—like the Cartesian ego—might unite them all.⁶⁵ Since he confuses self-consciousness with consciousness of a substantial ego, and since in fact there is no (sensuous) perception of the ego, he believes himself to have convicted the entire Cartesian tradition of incoherence. He overlooked the fact that the expressions 'sensation', 'impression', or 'perception' must analytically contain the property of consciousness (even without an ego), if such psychic processes are to be distinguished from their physical, or rather their intentional objects. And when Hume speaks of such conscious perceptions, he makes use of an awareness of consciousness that he can only deny at the cost of further self-contradiction. Fichte's critique of Kant also applies to Hume: the latter had self-consciousness, but without reflecting on it. And in partic-

ular Hume failed to realise that self-consciousness and ego-consciousness are not the same, so that the critique of Descartes' substantialisation of the ego in no way shows the possibility of a knowledge of consciousness, and thus of self-consciousness, to be incoherent.

However, Hume's radicalism was not characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon/empiricist tradition of the early eighteenth century in general, as we can learn from the *Essay on Consciousness*.⁶⁶ This tradition either assumed an 'inner sense' which directed itself towards objectified conscious experiences (and thus fell foul of the same critique as Descartes' theory of 'inspection' or '*témoignage inférieur*'); or (like Ralph Cudworth) it asserted an immediate awareness of sense-experience, although without making any enduring contribution to its clarification (Cudworth has recourse to metaphors derived from reflection theory to characterise the immediate awareness of sensation: "... that duplication, that is included in the Nature of synaesthesia, Con-Sense and Consciousness, which makes a Being Present with itself"; "wherefore that which is thus conscious of itself, and reflexive upon itself . . .").⁶⁷ For John Locke all thinking implies consciousness of thinking ("thinking consists in being conscious that one thinks")⁶⁸ and indeed is a mode which is distinguished from the reflexive-objectifying use of inner sense, a pre-reflexive or intuitive mode which Locke attributes not to animals, but only to rational beings. Here, however, the notion of 'thinking' is employed as broadly as in the Cartesian *cogitatis*, which refers to all modes of representation. Locke's thesis is surprising when one looks at it more closely:

Consciousness . . . is inseparable from thinking, and it seems to me essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, mediate, or will anything, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present Sensations and Perceptions.⁶⁹

Even Locke cannot escape the idea that self-consciousness 'accompanies' acts. Neither does he avoid the assumption that self-consciousness is comparable to a perception that makes other perceptions conscious. But when I *feel* pain, this *is* the required (self-conscious) perception; I do not need to perceive it in its turn. The logic of this model implies that the (perceived or accompanied) acts are not themselves necessarily conscious (which appears to be the case with animals according to Locke's view, since they have inner experiences

without being reflexively conscious of them). One may conclude that Locke considered self-consciousness to be an additional activity, modelled on reflection, which constantly accompanies the thought-processes of higher organisms. However, he made no contribution to the clarification of its structure.

Nevertheless, Locke's thesis that every act of thought is accompanied by a co-consciousness of thinking was strongly opposed by John Sergeant. In his, "Reflexions on Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding,"⁷⁰ Sergeant asserts, "We *may* think, *without being conscious that we Think*"⁷¹ (and illustrates this, unfortunately, with the case of a memory which is not at our immediate disposal, but which later returns, and thus precisely shows the continuity of consciousness, if not of reflection; Sergeant assimilates "remembrance" and "reflexion").⁷² Then he defends the counter-thesis to that of Locke, namely that "'T'is impossible to be conscious, or know *we know*, without a new Act of Reflexion,"⁷³ which would follow the primary, object-directed act of consciousness. Finally, he subjects the awareness of the act of reflection to the same condition: "'T'is impossible to be Conscious of, or know our present Reflex Act, but by a new Reflex one."⁷⁴ He explains this in the following way:

The same Argument demonstrates that we cannot be Conscious of our *Reflex Acts* at the very time we produce them. For, my First *Reflex Act* has for its sole Object that Operation of Mind, which I had immediately before by a *Direct* one; and my *Second Reflex Act* has for its object the *First*; and in the same manner, each succeeding Reflexion has for its Object—that *Act* which immediately *Proceeded*. Wherefore, if the First Reflex Act had for its Object, at the same time both the *Direct* and *itself* too; that is, did we, when we first Reflected, know by *that very Act itself* that we did reflect, then the Second Reflex Act would be forestall'd, and have no Proper Object left for it. To clear this better, let us assign one Reflexion to be the *Last*: it were not the *Last Reflexion*, unless the Object of it were that Reflexion which was the *last but one*. Wherefore, unless that Reflexion that went *last of all* remained *unknown*, the Last would have *two Objects*, viz. The *Preceding Reflexion* and *itself* too.⁷⁵

There we have an almost caricatural, and thus ideal, illustration of the circular theory of self-consciousness, based on the model of reflection. Sergeant assumes that every consciousness is objective, and consequently considers the consciousness of consciousness as the objectification of a foregoing con-

consciousness. The illusion of the immediate acquaintance of consciousness with itself is explained in terms of the ‘imperceptible rapidity’ with which the ‘Reflex Act’ follows the first one. Sergeant also assumes that the preceding consciousness acquires the quality of being conscious only under the gaze of the subsequent reflection directed upon it, which in its turn remains unconscious, until a further subsequent reflection raises it into consciousness. Thus, the last reflection, directed towards the penultimate one, remains non-objective, and this means: unconscious. The consequence is clear: “Hence we can never come to know our last Reflexion.”⁷⁶ But since the consciousness of all the preceding acts depends upon this last act, they too are unconscious, and the thesis that there is something like self-consciousness—even if mediated by reflection—destroys itself. “These are my reasons,” Sergeant summarises his “Certain and Evident Corollary,” “why I recede from Mr. *Locke* in his Opinion, that *A Man cannot think without being Conscious of it.*”⁷⁷

The theory of an unknown author (Pseudo-Mayne) fares better. This theory attributes to human beings a fundamental non-sensible knowledge of their own consciousness, and indeed sets the knowledge of objects in a relation of transcendental dependence on self-consciousness.

The Mind, in its several Acts of *Thinking* and *Perceiving*, of *Imaging*, *Remembering*, *Willing*, or *Affecting*, is *Conscious* of any of its Faculties, it is *conscious* of it, as its Objects, i.e. Something which is perceived by it self . . .

The Notion of Object (as I may here take the occasion to observe) is entirely owing to *Consciousness*; it being plainly impossible that I should be able to consider or regard anything, as having such an Appearance to me in my Act of Perceiving it, . . . any otherwise than by being *conscious* of my own *Perception*, and of the Appearance to which it refers. And whereupon it follows, that *consciousness* is indeed the Basis and Foundation of all Knowledge whatsoever; inasmuch as whatever I can know or Apprehend of a Thing by observing it, and reflecting on it with my *Understanding*, depends altogether on my first considering and regarding it as an Object, or something which hath such a certain Appearance to me in my perceiving it.⁷⁸

This (self-) consciousness is said to be clear and distinct, truthful and certain, present to the mind, and always adequate; it implies a feeling of existence and does not first arise through ‘reflection’, but is already at work in all reflection

(for example, that carried out by Descartes).⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Pseudo-Mayne presents it as 'accompanying' all *cogitationes*, thus assuming an analytical separation of the accompanying from the accompanied, which is not abolished by the addition of the term 'immediate' ('does immediately accompany').⁸⁰

Since Pseudo-Mayne does not set aside the common premises of all empiricists, according to which sense experience is the only source of knowledge, he also assumes that self-consciousness can only occur as a feature of an object-related act of perception in respect of which it (self-consciousness) is 'subsequent' and 'dependent':

For tho' we are as well *conscious* of every thing we do or act, as of our own Beings or selves; and it is absolutely requisite and necessary that some other should precede that of *Self-Consciousness*, for we are conscious of our selves only from our Acting, or because we act, and *Self-Consciousness* must of course depend therein for its Existence; yet is it impossible to be conscious of any Act whatever, without being sensible of, or perceiving one's *Self* to be that which Does it.⁸¹

This thesis is incompatible with the assumption of the pre-reflexive character of self-consciousness (which indeed is not clearly developed by Pseudo-Mayne). It shows clearly that our author belongs to a rich tradition of reflection theory, represented by names such as Sherlock and Robert South. The latter invites, in his considerations on a text of the former,⁸² that self-consciousness presupposes not only a person as its 'bearer' ('suppositum'), but first and foremost:

another Act Antecedent to it self. For it is properly and formally a *Reflex Act upon* the Acts, Passions, or Motions of the Person whom it belongs to . . . [and] being a *Reflex Act*, must needs in Order of Nature be posterior to the Act reflected upon by it.

Here self-consciousness is clearly explained as the subsequent reflection of a preceding (object-directed) representation and is given a temporal index ('posterior'). Another example is provided by Bishop Peter Browne's text, *The Procedure, Extent and Limits of Human Understanding*,⁸³ which is significant in general for the theory of consciousness.

. . . so that all the Operations of the Mind necessarily presuppose Ideas of Sensations as prior Materials for them to work upon; and without which

the Mind could not have worked at all; no, nor have even a Consciousness of itself, or of its own Being: Insomuch that it never could have exerted an Act of Thinking, if it had not been first provided with some of these to think upon; and this the compound word of consciousness plainly imports.⁸⁴

Pseudo-Mayne takes over this view, and thus becomes entangled in the following circle: on the one hand, every object-consciousness must have its condition of possibility in a non-sensible (purely intellectual) self-consciousness, whose bearer is a spiritual I-substance; on the other hand, self-consciousness can only appear as an epiphenomenon of, and subsequent to, an object-related act.

Neither does Pseudo-Mayne hesitate to attribute an *object* to self-consciousness: it has an (inner) 'object'. The correct insight that all object-consciousness presupposes self-consciousness⁸⁵ does not prevent the author from interpreting the kind of consciousness in which self-consciousness occurs as a special case of object-consciousness:

In narrowly inspecting and examining into *Conscious Knowledge* and *Perception*, we shall find that *Self*, or one's own proper Being, is its Principal and most proper object.⁸⁶

As a result of this recourse to the model of representation, Pseudo-Mayne does not hesitate to ascribe the mode of (inner) *perception* ('perceiving one's *Self*') to self-consciousness. But the fact that perceptions are always conscious does not entail that they themselves can be perceived as objects.⁸⁷ (When I have pains, consciousness is implicit in having the pains; I do not need in addition to 'feel' or 'sense' my pain, as people sometimes misleadingly say; furthermore, as self-observation, self-consciousness would lose its adequacy and distinctness.) No more helpful is the thesis that in self-perception the perceived object (the self) is given in an 'incomparably inward' way; perceiver and perceived are here the same.⁸⁸ Once subject-object duality is introduced into the relation of self-consciousness, its ideality *can* become epistemically uncertain; in reality, however, we encounter no identification problem in the sphere of self-consciousness.

The problematic character of this separation becomes more acute when Pseudo-Mayne denies consciousness to dreamers (as to animals).⁸⁹ If my dreams were unconscious, they could not be attributed to me as part of my biography as

a conscious being. Statements such as 'I remember that yesterday I dreamt of my first day in school' would be inadmissible. It is enough to say that the dream is not originally reflexively known; however, when I remember my dream of last night in a reflexive attitude, I can only do so because there is a continuity of consciousness between my present act of contemplation and that which was dreamt, which is itself known. Since the author grounds the unity of the person (and of all objects in general) on self-consciousness, this expulsion of the unconscious becomes all the more difficult to achieve.

Kant shares with Browne, Sherlock, Robert South, and Pseudo-Mayne the conviction that self-consciousness only appears in object-related consciousness (as the conscious unification of its manifold under categories).⁹⁰ Kant also becomes caught in the contradiction between his conviction that the thought 'I think' has Cartesian self-evidence (and is thus appropriate as the principle of deduction for the categories), and his inability to explain this self-evidence without recourse to the representational model, according to which consciousness—including that of the 'I'—stands over against its object. In reality, Kant interpreted the 'I' as the activity in which the subject of consciousness turns away from all particular objects, and, turning back upon itself, grasps its continuous identity with itself. Thereby this identity splits into the pure, non-objective spontaneity of the subject of knowledge and a phenomenal 'I' opposed to it, whose identification with the former rests on an unproven presupposition, and whose faultiness Kant perceived, but had no means of avoiding.⁹¹ This inadequacy implies the failure of the explanatory model employed by Kant. For if there is 'I'-hood (egoity), and if Cartesian self-evidence is claimed for it, then it cannot be based on a *petitio principii*. The model must therefore be false.

That's the way the problem arises—but no modern philosopher seems to have recognised it as such. The first to become aware of the full ramifications of the fundamental problem with the reflection theory of self-consciousness was Fichte, and I shall now deal in more detail, first with his suggested solution, then with why it doesn't satisfy either. Fichte wrote:

But there *is* consciousness; so that claim must be false. If it is false, then its opposite is true. Hence the following claim is true [you may ask: which claim? The one, according to which self-awareness is the result of a subjective act turned back onto itself as an object]: there is a consciousness in which

the subjective and the objective are not to be separated, but are absolutely [and without any mediation] one and the same. Thus it is this kind of consciousness that would be needed to explain consciousness at all.⁹²

The bogus claim to which Fichte refers runs something like this: I come to know the I through reflection, which is to say that the I enters into a self-relation and consequently sets eyes upon itself.

But how can the subject recognise itself, if it is to be true that it is nothing but pure subject? Kant drew a definite distinction between pure apperception and the 'I think' and even went so far as to claim that the former produces the latter.⁹³ It corresponded to his distinction between pure, non-objective being and the objectified self-appearance [*das gegenständliche Sich-Erscheinen*] of the I.⁹⁴ If it is true that knowledge proper is only ever knowledge of phenomena which stand over and against a knowing subject (and Kant's conviction on this matter never wavered), then there can be no knowledge of the Subject-I, which thus remains an unfounded assumption.

The theory of reflection as Kant inherited it from Descartes and Leibniz (as well as numerous other thinkers from the British empiricist tradition) has therefore to presuppose the very phenomenon whose structure it took upon itself to explain. That is why Fichte repudiated the 'sophistry' of reflection theory in his lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1797-1799).

I shall briefly sketch the main thrust of Fichte's argument. If our experience of being conscious of ourselves were the result of a concatenation of several states of consciousness, whereby the penultimate state of consciousness were always witnessed by the last one in the series, then there would be no self-consciousness. This is because the same conditions hold for the final consciousness, namely, that in order to become conscious of itself, it would have to be made the object of yet another consciousness. But this other state of consciousness needs to be unconscious, attaining self-consciousness only through being objectified in its turn, and so on *ad infinitum*. But there *is* consciousness; so this model must be wrong. If wrong, then consciousness must have been immediately acquainted with itself, that is, prior to any objectification by means of a succeeding consciousness. Fichte accounts for this immediate self-acquaintance as the complete indiscernibility of subject and object in self-consciousness. Now in Kantian terminology an immediate consciousness

is an intuition. But what is intuited here, is not a spatio-temporal entity, like in sensible intuition, but rather the being of the sheer spontaneity of apperception: hence the intuition is deemed to be intellectual.

Once we do know this so well, the question arises again of how we found it out. Obviously we intuited the very intuition of the internally acting 'I'. Hence it must be possible to have an intuition of the internally acting 'I', and such an intuition is intellectual. This does not refute the Kantian system. Kant only denies the possibility of a sensible intellectual intuition and rightly so. However, the intuition of the I is not something fixed, quiescent, it is an *acting I*. In his system Kant does not explicitly consider this type of intellectual intuition, the type that results from our representations being the product of our own self-active mind. Kant's system nevertheless presupposes the result of this type of intellectual intuition.⁹⁵

If the I must indeed be explained by intellectual intuition, then several consequences ensue. Firstly, self-consciousness can no longer be considered as a result of deliberate, purposive action (one can only posit *oneself*, if one already *knows* what 'self' means). Being coincides here (and only here) with being known. Fichte puts this another way, namely: all consciousness of something (including its own psychological states) presupposes an immediate consciousness of the initial consciousness itself.⁹⁶ Secondly, self-consciousness is not an instance of knowledge, because all knowledge is conceptual, and concepts are related mediately to objects, through the analysis of a feature or features common to several representations. Thirdly, self-consciousness is not an instance of genuine (informative) identification. Every identification equates semantically discernible elements according to certain criteria. But in self-consciousness there is no such difference of polarity, and no need for such criteria. Identity is a form of relation (indeed it is the most precise of all forms of relation, in the eyes of contemporary logicians), whereas self-consciousness is unitary and acquainted with itself in the absence of any detour via a second term.

III

The figure of speech with which tradition likes to sum up the early romantic post-Fichteana is that of 'outdoing' (or even out-Fichteing) Fichte, and,

provided one can make clear what it means to out-Fichte Fichte, this judgement is not inappropriate. The accepted version is that, what is outdone, is Fichte's alleged subjectivism. This view of romanticism predominates in the tradition which spans such thinkers as Hegel, Rosenkranz, Kierkegaard, Haym and even Heidegger. It is, however, not just erroneous, but actually reverses the main current of the early romantic continuation of the Fichtean project. If Fichte was indeed outdone, then it was not by virtue of ever more extravagant subjectivism, but, on the one hand, by an increasing concern as to the meaning of the term 'identity', to which Fichte had allotted the central position in his grounding principle, and on the other, by a radicalisation of his critique of the reflection model of self-consciousness.

Both concerns are closely allied. I shall begin with the first, and then proceed to the second. In what follows I shall take Hölderlin and Novalis as representative of the whole of the early romantic movement, because their thought alone attained a sufficient degree of thoroughness and clarity. They levelled the following accusation at Fichte; namely, that he had been lucid enough to spot the shortcomings of the reflection model of self-consciousness, but had ultimately failed to find a way around them. This criticism seems harsh and above all unfair. The point is nonetheless not unfounded, and from about 1800 Fichte—with the early Romantic critique evidently in mind—had himself toyed with the idea of making certain improvements to the formulation of his principle, improvements which show a similar train of thought to that of his critics, and which have been definitively presented elsewhere by Dieter Henrich.⁹⁷

These improvements pertain to the notion of intellectual intuition that in what follows was to be suppressed. When, contrary to Kant's own intentions, Fichte took up the claim of intellectual intuition, as the presupposition of all method, including Kantian criticism, he meant to vindicate this with the thought that self-consciousness could not legitimately be thought as the opposition of a subject and an object. Intuition alone could vouchsafe the indiscernibility of both poles, and this intuition, due to the intellectual nature of the 'I', certainly had to be understood as non-sensible.

On further analysis, however, it becomes clear that the formula of intellectual intuition is not up to the task of explaining the complete lack of differentiation between that which has consciousness, and that *of which* consciousness

is had. The formula does draw a clear distinction between an object and a subject of consciousness, and, furthermore, between an intuition and a concept. In other texts Fichte distinguishes, with no less conviction, between the original, intuitively observed act of self-positing and its result, the thereby obtained concept 'I'. Of course he swiftly re-emphasises their indiscernibility and moreover, he emphatically repudiates the notion that the two moments could be separated in time; (the rather hackneyed phrase 'in one fell swoop' is supposed to make the paradox disappear). Hölderlin and Novalis are not that gullible. They point out that, as soon as a duality of moments is introduced into the sphere of self-consciousness, then its prereflexivity must remain in question. No binary structure could possibly furnish the grounds of a strict identity. Underlying this critique is a radicalisation of the meaning of the term 'identity', for identity has traditionally always been defined as a relation. In fact Fichte does define the concept 'I' further as "activity returning into itself."⁹⁸ He even believed both terms to be synonymous:

I prefer to use the term egoity rather than the word intelligence: since the latter is the most direct description of the return of activity into itself, for those capable of only minimal attention.⁹⁹

Within the defining term 'egoity' the activity can be discerned from the process of its return into itself. Fichte goes one step further and assigns to this activity the cognitive mode of intuition. Only such a cognitive intuition, he thinks, can establish both immediate consciousness and the lack of all distinction between what posits and what is posited. The intuition intuits the act of self-positing, even before it comes to the light of conceptual differentiation. Fichte uses the term consciousness to mean distinct consciousness, (true to the tradition of Leibniz and Kant in which consciousness is defined as explicit, distinct or reflected consciousness).¹⁰⁰ Yet at the same time he holds self-consciousness to be completely immediate, and moreover, immediately conscious.¹⁰¹ Hence he slides into terminological ambiguity. One moment he stresses that intuition is not merely immediate, but also conscious, the next he claims that consciousness presupposes conceptual differentiation (and thus the possibility of mediation). At times he only disputes that intuition has 'distinct consciousness' (borrowing the Cartesian/Leibnizian distinction), but grants it clarity of consciousness,¹⁰² which, as Leibniz and Wolff use the term,¹⁰³ does not exclude confusion [*confusionem*].¹⁰³ Whatever the case, according to Fichte the intuition

ensures the immediacy of consciousness, but does not suffice to establish the distinctness of the concept 'I'. Hence what is needed is a concept to establish the identity of the intuited contents. But concepts are mediate, they refer to a feature common to several representations; in this case the feature which belongs to, or better still, which constitutes an I. Representations [*Vorstellungen*] are distinguished by means of concepts, and distinction presupposes opposition; *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Here are Fichte's own words.

Only the state of opposition can make clear to us what it is to act, (for an act strictly speaking cannot be defined); [it is only] through fixity and repose that we can think *activity*, and hence conversely we can only think repose through activity.¹⁰⁴

There is a law at work here, one that Fichte later, with great lucidity, was to call "The law of reflection that governs all our cognition":

namely: we cannot know what something is, without our thinking at the same time that which it is not.¹⁰⁵

To know something, to know something conceptually by opposing it to something else, means 'determining something', and 'determination' (conversely) in the *Doctrine of Science* means delimitation, narrowing something down to a particular region or sphere of our knowledge.¹⁰⁶

In order to identify myself as me (and to differentiate myself from all that is not I)¹⁰⁷ I have to distinguish myself from everything else, that is, to limit myself to an extension, which still allows for some otherness on my side, against which I can define myself. Distinction rests essentially upon a relation of differentiation ("determined is to say limited, or confined to a particular sphere by means of what is opposite").¹⁰⁸ However, differentiation gainsays both the claim to simultaneity and immediacy *and* the subject-object identity in intellectual intuition. Fichte in fact speaks of a 'law of reflection' without which (distinct) consciousness would not take place. It infiltrates the innermost articulation of the *cogito* and destroys its pretensions to prereflexivity. In this manner an unbridgeable dualism is engendered in the structure of egoity; in order to describe this duality, the positing activity which intuition lays hold of, has to be distinguished from its own result—the concept. The concept is the *product* of intuition; a state of repose in contrast to the intuition itself, which is characterised by *agility*.¹⁰⁹

In this repose we can observe that the positing of activity turns into the posited. This is to say that this activity is first thought of as non-action, i.e. in a state of fixity and quiescence. It is perceived and intuited thereafter as quiescent, for otherwise we could not actively intuit the activity as active. In this manner a product, or rather, the concept of the 'I' comes to be. This 'I' can be thought but not intuited, since acting activity alone constitutes intuition, and acting activity cannot be thought without simultaneously thinking its opposite, namely the same activity in its previous state of repose, i.e. without a concept. Concept and intuition—which are always immediately and simultaneously combined—coincide, collapse into one.¹¹⁰

However, Fichte only asserts the coincidence of concept and intuition. So, what seems to happen to Fichte, in spite of his intentions, is that he lapses back into the reflection model of consciousness. He draws in fact a distinction (in almost Kantian terms) between what are intrinsically blind intuitions on the one hand, and empty thoughts on the other. Their difference is clear, not so their 'collaps[ing] into one'. From 1800 onwards Fichte attempted to locate identity beyond the sphere of reflection. But this is not my current topic.

Instead I shall try to show the precise meaning that is given to the term of 'identity' in the *Doctrine of Science*. We have just seen how the notion of 'identity' contradicts the immediacy of self-acquaintance, and how Fichte would have done better not to employ this term in such a context. It is understandable, however, that he should want to hold on to the term. For the Leibnizian tradition had defined identity as a relation holding between semantically different entities which concur in all essential features. Hume had added that simplicity (the characteristic of something's being itself, so as to be capable of being predicated of itself tautologically and without contradiction) was not to be confused with identity. For, whether or not something is identical to something else cannot be decided analytically; an identity cannot be inferred from semantic features and the mere application of the law of non-contradiction alone. On the contrary, judgements of identity only make sense in Hume's view when that which is identified, and that by means of which it is identified, can be indicated by two different verbal expressions (or two different modes of being of an object); with the result that the identification forms a synthetic judgement that adds to my knowledge: (simplicity is tautological, whereas identity is informative).

Fichte does not want to relinquish the distinctness of either of the two terms that coalesce in the identity-judgement of self-consciousness, since this would rule out a conceptual knowledge of the self. On the other hand, this distinctness cannot be relied upon, or we risk losing the immediacy of self-consciousness.

In the third opening paragraph of the first *Doctrine of Science* (1794-5) Fichte, following in the footsteps of Reinhold and Maimon, tries to defend the view that difference and sameness can and do coexist in the ultimate grounding principle of philosophy. His argument runs as follows:

Every opposite is like its opponent in one respect = X; and each like is opposed to its like in one respect = X. Such a respect = X is called the ground; in the first case of conjunction, and in the second, of distinction: for to liken or compare opposites is to conjoin them, and to set like things in opposition is to distinguish them.¹¹¹

This claim is 'proven' in the following way. A and B are the two terms to be conjoined with and distinguished from each other. If I then oppose A with B (in the sense of positing the one in place of the other), A must nevertheless remain partially intact, otherwise B would have no opposing term, and the relation would fall apart. Thus A is only partially annulled in favour of B, as something of A remains. Fichte uses the symbol X to show that A and B, in order to oppose each other, have at the same time to share a common domain. The formula 'A is not B' can therefore be replaced by, 'there is an X which is partly A and partly B'.

The same holds for the relation of identity between the two. If I judge that 'A is the same as B' I do not necessarily assert that A, insofar as it is A, is also B, or that B, qua B is at the same time A. That would be absurd, for in this case I would not have identified one entity with another, but would only have uttered a tautology; I would merely have said the same thing twice. Identity cannot take place between one term and itself, for the very good reason that here there would then be no second term to be related by identity to the first. Moreover, if the semantic distinction of A and B ('I' and 'not I') is a necessary condition for a possible relation of identity to obtain between the terms, then it seems to be the case that an identification presupposes *a priori non-self-sameness*¹¹² of the *relata*. Instead of writing 'A = B' we have to try and describe this relation in another way: there is an X, such that this X

is A on the one hand and B on the other. But A is not B, and B is not A—*qua* A and *qua* B respectively. In this manner Fichte can declare the proposition 'A = B' to be commensurate with the opposite proposition 'A ≠ B'. The actual identity, that is, the strict identity in the sense of complete unison, takes place not between the terms A and B, but between the X and itself (here in the sense of Humean 'simplicity'). This identity alone is absolute, the one between A and B presupposes difference, and is thus only relative. Now, the question arises, however, of whether an identity (defined that way) can be known of in self-awareness. And the romantic thinkers deny this with emphasis. (Schelling developed this idea of Fichte in illuminating fashion, without actually adding anything new. He speaks pertinently of a "union that is the unity of the subject, not the predicates" which is fully compatible with "the so-called principle of non-contradiction".)¹¹³ Anyhow, Fichte quite clearly understands the third principle of the first *Wissenschaftslehre* not as the principle of contradiction, but merely as the principle of opposition. I and not-I are diametrically opposed, and thereby, as the extreme members of a sub-category, fall under the higher concept of the absolute I, and—by 'quantifying' themselves—have to divide themselves up into reality.

IV

The early romantic thinkers, most of whom (including Johann Friedrich Herbart) attended Fichte's lectures on the *Doctrine of Science*, were well acquainted with the Fichtean theory of the self. Following, indeed furthering Fichte's critique of Kant, they took up the (epistemic) question of how to understand this identity which, like the identity of the Kantian subject of consciousness, is condemned to remain a mere presupposition of any relation, be it one of unification or opposition. If strict identity takes place only between X and itself, then although identity can become manifest in consciousness (whose being is conditioned by opposition and distinctness, according to Fichte, and the divisive form of judgement according to Novalis and Hölderlin), identity cannot be understood through its function there. Strict identity (or 'absolute' identity to the early Romantics) would in this case, so to speak, emigrate out of consciousness and occupy a position that is not merely pre-reflexive but wholly irreflexive with regard to consciousness. This is in fact the very conclusion reached by Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich von

Hardenberg (Novalis) along their different but related paths of thought. This conclusion is a logically consistent development of the Fichtean critique of tradition, but it has certain ramifications that can no longer be reconciled with consciousness-immanent idealism.¹¹⁴

Hölderlin attended Fichte's first lecture series at Jena on the *Doctrine of Science*, as can be seen from his first letters to his friends Schelling and Hegel. In late January of 1795, Hegel writes to Schelling:

Hölderlin writes to me from Jena every so often (. . .) He's listening to Fichte, and is full of enthusiasm for him, likening him to a Titan fighting for mankind, whose sphere of influence will certainly not remain confined to the four walls of the auditorium.¹¹⁵

On the 19th of January 1795, Hölderlin had written to Neuffer: "I am now working full time every day, and only in the evening do I manage to attend Fichte's collegium." He relates his first impressions in a letter to Hegel on the 26th of January 1795, and they give a foretaste of his later critique of Fichte:

Fichte seems, if I may make so bold, to have stood at the crossroads, [between criticism and dogmatism] indeed he is still there—much of what he says shows that he wants to go beyond the fact of consciousness within theory, that much is certain, and it strikes me as even more transcendent than the desire of all previous metaphysicians to go beyond worldly existence—his absolute 'I' (= Spinozean substance) contains all reality. It is everything; there is nothing outside it; this absolute 'I' thus has no object, for otherwise it would not contain all reality within it; but consciousness without an object is unthinkable, and if I myself am to be this object, then I am as such necessarily limited, if only in time, but I am therefore not absolute; hence consciousness cannot be thought in the absolute 'I'; as absolute 'I' I do not have consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness, I am nothing (for myself), hence the absolute 'I' is nothing (for me).¹¹⁶

It is noticeable that in this argument there is a certain hesitancy, indecisiveness, indeed a tendency to recoil as it develops. In solidarity with the spirit of Kantian criticism, Hölderlin begins with the observation that the search for an 'I' which is prior to all relation, and which grounds all our knowledge, is an overly ambitious enterprise which takes no heed of the limits of our

faculty of cognition. A little later he remarks that an 'I' cannot, in any case, be called absolute, if it is conceived as an object upon which cognition is brought to bear, since objectification calls forth limitation. And his conclusion is equally aporetic. An absolute I, beyond the bounds of my understanding, would be unthinkable for us, and hence nothing.

The conviction that consciousness presupposes opposition and that the absolute identity must therefore be unconscious pervades the preliminary draughts of *Hyperion*, which in part predate, and which are in part contemporaneous with Hölderlin's attendance of Fichte's lectures. The preface to the *Fragment of Hyperion*, written as early as mid-1794, distinguishes between "a state of ultimate simplicity" based upon "the mere organisation of nature," and a state of highest education (. . .) by means of the organisation which we are capable of giving ourselves."¹⁷ Between the two points there runs the "eccentric path" ("*exzentrische Bahn*"). I shall not comment upon this phrase, which has attracted so much interpretive attention. Contextual correlates clearly show that both the natural unity, and the unity achieved by means of education, their transreflexive status notwithstanding, are composite and articulated. With this unity there are "in general and in particular" "essential orientations," which other texts gloss as antagonistic tendencies proper to being, within the domain of the unconditioned or of love, (the prose version and the metrical version of winter 1794/5 are particularly good examples of this). With this exciting thought, Hölderlin, doubtless under Niethammer's influence, departs abruptly from the Jacobian idea, whereby the unconditioned has to be thought of, even for the most obvious semantic reasons, as unencumbered by any opposition which would situate it in a relation—in other words, the unconditioned is bereft of all opposition which would condition it. Perhaps the reader is familiar with the beautiful iambic pentameters in which *Hyperion* (in the metrical version of winter 1794/5) is delivered by "a wise man" (line 27) from his reliance on the subject-object schema of the modern age. He then draws a distinction between a state of unconscious purity, intimacy, and freedom on the one hand (corresponding directly to the natural state of "ultimate simplicity" mentioned in the preface to the *Fragment of Hyperion*), and a state of consciousness on the other:

The day on which the beauteous world began,
Began for us the indigence of life,

and we exchanged our state of consciousness,
for our state of purity and freedom.¹¹⁸

At this point Hölderlin comes up with a conception of essential unity as a structure articulated through opposition, a conception which is incompatible with the dualistic intuition of Descartes and Kant, and even that of Fichte, and one which, although not widely known, heralds a turning point of modern thought.

Pure spirit, free of passion, embraces
Not the stuff of life, and is not conscious
Of any thing, not even of itself,
Pure spirit has no world, beyond its bounds
Is nothing.—Yet these words are merely thoughts.—
We feel the limitations of our being
And the hindered power strives impatient
Against its shackles and the spirit longs
Back into the distant, undimm'd ether.
And yet within us there is something, that
Wants to keep its chains, for if the divine
In us encountered no resistance, then
We'd not feel one another or ourselves.
But not to feel oneself, amounts to death,
To know nought, to be obliterated,
Are for us the same.—Were we to deny
The drive to stride forth t'ward the infinite,
To purify, ennoble, liberate
Ourselves: that would be brutish. But neither
Must we proudly set ourselves above
The drive to limitation, to passion:
that would not be human, tw'ere almost death.
So love unites the conflict of the drives,
None of which can rest unsatisfied.¹¹⁹

The first lines basically reproduce the position of the preface to the *Hyperion* fragment. This position can also be found in the aforementioned letter to Hegel of January the 26th, which contains Hölderlin's thoughts on Fichte's lectures. The unity, which remains forever presupposed by the self-relation

of consciousness, can itself not be thought as conscious, and hence it is “nothing for us.” Therefore this unity is no longer just the prior ground of reflection (used synonymously with ‘consciousness’), but rather the transcendent ground. Schleiermacher, in his lectures on *Dialectics*, will make the characteristic move of replacing the phrase “transcendental ground” with the alternative “transcendent ground.”¹²⁰

To return to the above quotation from the metrical version, the second half moves beyond the demand for a suprarreflective unity. The ultimate—unconscious—unity is nevertheless not opaque, it has an internal structure. It opens the space for two antagonistic drives in which Schelling’s notion of a “reciprocity of hindrance and striving” is prefigured.¹²¹ This interrelation is articulated as the opposition between a real activity, heading forth into the infinite, and an ideal activity, working retroactively against the first, driving it back into itself. If the unconditioned were to be represented on the model of infinite striving, then it would remain unconscious. But if it showed itself to be limited, it would contradict its own concept (determination presupposes negation, hence limitation, and hence conditions; whereas the infinite is *completudo realitatis*). Thus the unconditioned is discursively represented as hindered or inhibited striving (*gehemmtes Streben*) (a solution we also find in Novalis, in Friedrich Schlegel, and in Schelling). For the sake of conceptual clarity, the unconditioned binds itself, albeit transiently, to limitation, but in virtue of its infinity, it constantly transgresses its own limitations. In a word, the unconditioned is made manifest as *excentricity* or *ecstasis*, as the temporality of consciousness, whereby ‘temporal’ is understood according to its celebrated definition as the being ‘that is, what it is not, and that is not, what it is’.

The discordance between “the drive to stride forth to infinity” (which Hölderlin calls ‘real activity’) and the “drive to limitation” (or ‘ideal activity’) does not on this account destroy the structure of the unconditioned. It is rather its most proper articulation: “*Den Widerstreit der Triebe, deren keiner / Entbehrlich ist, vereinigt die Liebe.*” (“The combat between the [two] drives, neither of which / Can be missed, is unified through love.”)

‘Love’ is usually understood as a consubstantial relation between beings, equal in status and autonomy, which leaves no room for bondage or coercion. Schelling puts it beautifully:

It is the mystery of love, that it bonds in such a way, that each can be for itself, but neither is nor can be without the other.¹²²

Through love a being transcends the 'sphere' of its individuality whose centre of gravity seems to lie outside itself. A person who is, as was once said, 'inflamed' by the love for another, seeks his own worth outside of himself, he seeks to reclaim his own essence in a heightened form, from where his/her beloved lies. The lover, says Schiller, does not desire the other, like he or she desires to possess a thing, but values the other, as one respects a person.¹²³ So, in defiance of all dualistic intuition *à la* Kant and Fichte, love calls forth a principle that surpasses the dichotomy of self and other, a principle which embraces two related terms equiprimordially, without one having to be sacrificed "to the God that reigns within us" [*dem in uns waltenden Gott*"],¹²⁴ though the lovers do indeed experience the bond that unites them as the "God within us."¹²⁵

This speculative conception of love brings into play a completely new conception of what identity is.

Since the conception was first developed in the analysis of the structure of self-regulating entities, that is, organisms, it is not difficult to understand why, in this context, so much weight is attached to the concept of nature, as a being, bearing the highest degree of organisation. Hölderlin takes the idea one step further: not only nature, as a whole, but spirit itself is organically structured. Spirit consists in the absolute identity of the real and the ideal, an identity that is articulated as the complete equiprimordially of identity and difference. This formula is often incorrectly associated with the name of Hegel, and contains the following thought: unlike tautology (whereby one and the same thing is merely repeated, $A = A$), identity is not trivial, it is a real relation. The model of identity is $A = B$. It shows, how, "to use a fairly mundane example, a man who for instance has two names, can nevertheless be one and the same person."¹²⁶ This example bears a striking resemblance to Frege's Venus, which is differently determined as the evening and the morning star, but not at the cost of its identity, and qua evening star is the same as the morning star, and not trivially so. (It took thousands of years for mankind to discover this identity. Schelling would say that it took thousands of years for mankind to grasp their own identity with nature, in a non-reductive way, that is, neither materialistically nor idealistically). In much the same

way absolute identity identifies two semantically discernible terms—the ideal and the real limiting activity, an activity that strives towards infinity. However, this difference remains only a virtual difference in the matrix of the absolute, and only becomes actual when I disregard the bond that unites the two. This means to say that two things which are only virtually opposed can still co-exist; since that which can only be real, but is not, is powerless to banish from its domain that which can only be ideal, but is not. Only when one of the moments is realised, does it have to eject the other from its place, and determine this other as its predecessor or successor. Once we disregard the bond of ‘substantial unity’, then the real opposes itself to the ideal, and only in virtue of this actuated relativity does the whole succeed in realising itself as finite and temporal reality that is opposed to the absolute.¹²⁷

It follows that Hölderlin’s philosophy of love could not be deemed a philosophy of *absolute* identity, if its concept of the absolute did not also include what it is not—the relativity, the difference of the separate essential tendencies. Relativity proves, on the one hand, to be a moment within the structure of the absolute, since whatever manner of ‘Being’ persists in relativity, it is nothing but the presence of the whole in the part, and the whole here means precisely the absence of all distinction between difference and identity. In this manner the structure of the absolute is analogous to that of the organism, which similarly includes within itself its own opposite—mechanism.

However, amongst all these poetic drafts of a philosophy of love, one thing remains ambivalent and undecided. It is the seamlessness of the identity which guarantees that the relation between infinite striving, and limiting activity is indeed a true *self*-relation. But this identity cannot be evinced from the duality of reflecting and reflected moments alone; it is still presupposed, rather than posited by reflection. For this very reason Hölderlin comes up with a solution, a few months after the metrical version—supposedly in May 1795 (though, as will be shown, this supposition is perhaps unjustified)—a solution which he scribbled down upon the fly leaf of a copy of a book—we ignore which one.¹²⁸ I shall now attempt to sketch out the bones of his argument.

Kant sees judgement as the activity of thinking, an idea that stems from the “*Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard*” in Rousseau’s *Emile*. Every judgement works towards cementing a synthetic unity, for a judgement is nothing but

the combination of a subject and a predicate. Now if the resultant proposition is true, then what is known is the type of relation that holds between the proposition and the object it denotes (analytic judgements either presuppose a prior synthesis, or they are tautological, like judgements of logic, which are based exclusively upon the principle of non-contradiction). Hölderlin, under the aegis of Kant, but drawing upon a vogueish though bogus etymology, interprets the German word *Urteil* (judgement), as the index of an originary separation *Ur-teilung*.¹²⁹ In the act of judgement a prior unity is split into two members or two *relata*, whose relation at once conceals and reveals the original unity: *reveals*, because two different representations are combined in the judgement, hence they are both referred back to a grounding unity, but *conceals*, because this unity never appears as such but only *as* the differentiation of two mutually dependent types of representation (that is, the unity is articulated through grammatical subjects and concepts). Hölderlin then applies this general principle to the judgement 'I = I'. Even here there is a differentiation: the judgement divides the *relata*, otherwise the determinacy of what was judged would be occluded. But in this case the differentiation occurs because the *content* of the judgement contradicts its own *form*. What the judgement states is that the *relata* are undifferentiated. But *formally* what happens is that the judgement differentiates the undifferentiated terms. From this observation Hölderlin draws the following conclusion. On the one hand, I can have no knowledge about something without my forming a judgement upon it, that is to say, without my depriving it of its absolute identity. On the other hand, the judgement, as a relation (of two things, for instance the I and itself), is now dependent upon a fundamental and non-relative identity. It follows quite clearly that the synthesis of judgement has to be distinguished from a pre-judgemental, non-relative unity. Hölderlin joins Spinoza and Jacobi in naming the latter unity 'Being' ('*Seyn*'). Being is of a higher order than the relative or predicative identity of which Fichte speaks. Being cannot be thought, (since to think is to judge, and to judge is to differentiate) yet I cannot simply do without being, since the actual and evident experience of the 'I = I' qua ego-identity remains a mystery without the postulate of a unity that grounds the terms of the relation.

Strictly speaking it is not only the pre-identitarian unity that cannot be derived from relations within judgements. Hölderlin supposes that self-consciousness is only made possible "by opposing myself to myself, by separating myself

from myself, but by recognising the identity of the opposed self in spite of the separation."¹³⁰ Put differently: not only is it the case that the reflection model of self-consciousness cannot explain the fact that subject and object are identical; it also fails to explain how my awareness that in dealing with the other of myself I am indeed dealing with myself ('as the same self'). (For it could always happen that a subject and an object as conceived in our self-consciousness are identical without our conscious awareness of this identity; thus it is quite conceivable that someone correctly identifies a person as X, and knows of X that he is such-and-so, without, at the same time, necessarily knowing that his knowing actually amounts to an epistemic *self*-relation).¹³¹

This initial idea represents in my opinion a deep conviction underlying all early Romantic thought. It is the assumption that Being, qua simple, seamless unity, in contrast to the Kantian or Fichtean *cogito*, cannot be epistemically retrieved from either relations of judgement or reflection, which all perform an originary separation on what they were supposed to unite, and only ever manage to presuppose the original, simple unity. Hölderlin's critique of Fichte is to be found in the way he emphatically opposes '*intellektuale Anschauung*' (as he calls it) to the act of *Ur-teilung*: judging, or originary separation (that is, the determinate consciousness of something.)

The radicality of this move takes it a step beyond Fichte's conception of intellectual intuition, which articulates the claim to immediate unity only mediately, that is, by means of the conceptual pair of intuition and intellection. Of course a conceptual pair could betoken unity, but only with the circular presupposition, that immediate knowledge of this unity already existed, prior to the act of originary separation. If, on the contrary, knowledge is bound to consciousness, then we are forced to conclude that there can in principle be no knowledge of the absolute unity, which is only mediately available to us in the play of reflection.

Hölderlin's objection to Fichte is more extensively expounded and more clearly thought out in a lengthy footnote to another of his essays not intended for publication, *On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit*.¹³² Again I shall only summarise Hölderlin's thoughts.¹³³ Hölderlin argues in the following manner: The two defining characteristics of the representation 'I'—that it is simultaneously absolute and self-referential—are mutually exclusive. If egoity were subject to the condition of having to refer to external reality in the form of a

synthetic judgement, then its claim to unconditionality would *a fortiori* be null and void, since it would depend upon relation, and relation means quite the opposite of absoluteness. On the other hand, we cannot, for the sake of expounding the 'I', do away altogether with its claim to unconditionality, for then we would be left with two discrete and non-identical parts, and the moment of *self*-possession—the evident feeling of identity and oneness in my consciousness of myself—would remain unexplained and inexplicable. Therefore we cannot afford to drop either viewpoint. We must stress the point that the active self-relation of the I does not give rise to knowledge of the absolute identity of what is combined in this relation (but not by it). Yet I do have this knowledge in an utterly pellucid way. Hence Hölderlin concludes that within the "infinite oneness of the self" there is revealed "an ultimately united and unifying power which is not an I as such."¹³⁴

Sometimes Hölderlin calls this power the 'One', and sometimes 'Being', but always in contrast to identity, which only creates relative (synthetic) or judgmental links between related terms, thus laying claim to a criterion that cannot be discursively retrieved from the relation as such, but a criterion that always has to be presupposed. Being does found consciousness, but strictly speaking it is not itself conscious (insofar as consciousness is synonymous with reflection, as it is for the whole of the post-Leibnizian tradition). In this sense we can speak of the primacy of Being over consciousness. The light in which consciousness basks, does not radiate from consciousness itself but comes from a ground which is not causal and which consciousness can never quite illuminate. Only the inexhaustible wealth of meaning in aesthetic representation manages to depict it as such, that is, as reflexively non-representable; herein lies the superiority of aesthetic means of expression over speculative ones. This is the consequence that Hölderlin draws from the *aporia* that concludes the above-mentioned footnote.

Even if the footnote was not written down before 1800, we can still get an accurate picture of the state and content of Hölderlin's thought of around 1795 by looking at the so-called *Philosophische Raisonnements* of his friend Isaak von Sinclair. This will also enlighten us as to the aesthetic consequences that Hölderlin draws from the failure of reflection epistemically to retrieve the absolute. Unlike his friend, Sinclair had come to Jena as early as 1794 and was amongst those present at the reading of the first (theoretical) part of

Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*. Moreover, Sinclair came into contact with Karl Christian Erhard Schmid, an early intellectual ally (and later opponent) of Fichte's, a man who was close to Novalis, having formerly been his tutor, and whom he had kept informed of the fate of the *Doctrine of Science* and the surrounding debate. Sinclair valued Fichte and Schmid above all for political reasons:

Their cold inspection, their reasoning which proceeds from the depths of reason, and which spreads to all branches of human action, will vindicate the rights of man and overthrow the thrones.¹³⁵

In the winter term Hölderlin came to Jena along with Jakob Zwilling, another friend whom Hölderlin will meet again in Bad Homburg.¹³⁶ Of the three Sinclair, who had been part of the intellectual circle formed by the former students of Reinhold and the friends of Niethammer, was by far the most capable of giving an informed judgement about Fichte's own thought. As far as the dating of the notes is concerned, we can be fairly precise. The notes are written on the back of a programme for a concert which took place on the 6th of December 1795. Sinclair later twice reworked the *Raisonnements*, which were hastily and rhapsodically written, but the main ideas of the two subsequent versions did not substantially alter. Dieter Henrich and Hannelore Hegel suggest that it is likely that the theory sketched out by Sinclair assumes knowledge of Hölderlin's *Urtheil und Seyn*. On this account it is all the more instructive, all the more conceptually acute, and all the more delightfully argued.

The *Raisonnements* presents four theses. 1) Reflection (which in everyday language is termed judgement) is a separation, in which the demand for unity lives on, and is co-positd as such a demand. 2) Fichte's 'I' is not a substance. 3) Praxis cannot be evinced from theory: and finally 4) Being's resistance to discursive articulation by reflection raises art to the emblem *ne plus ultra* of the downfall of philosophy. Of these four theses, only the first interests us here. As stated above, the position corresponds to Hölderlin's conviction that the relation of one to another (for us or from the third-person perspective) can always be a self-relation, but that the self can only apprehend its own act in the other by means of its knowledge of a unity that survives within the separation and yet goes beyond it. Insofar as this (material) unity cannot make itself manifest as such in the form of separation, it becomes a mere postulate (or a demand). But this demand must be rationally motivated within

the structure of self-consciousness, and this motive is the factual knowledge of myself as a single and united (not as a divided) being.

Sinclair (along with Novalis) was the first to hold consciousness to be a positing [*Setzung*] or 'thesis'.¹³⁷ What is posited by consciousness is the other of itself (the object or itself as object). Since judgement—as the originary expression of the self-sundering of Being, or of the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ¹³⁸—consists in just such a thesis, then Being proper has to be thought as immaterial, non-objective. Being corresponds to the mode of consciousness pertaining to the non-positing *cogito*, the 'athesis'.¹³⁹ *Aisthesis*, which Sinclair, by dint of an adventurous etymology, renders as 'Aeisthesis' (or continual positing), makes the content of what is not posited and what cannot be posited comprehensible to the positing consciousness. In this sense "the aesthetic reality (. . .) [is] a self-denial of the I, a repudiation of the pure thesis"; it is the return of dirempt Being into aesthetic unity.¹⁴⁰ This (positive) sense of 'aesthetic', however, stands over and against the (Kantian) 'aesthetic' of the sensible world, whereby 'Aeisthesis' takes on yet another meaning, namely the persistence of the divisions of finite human understanding: "Knowledge is always incomplete for the aesthetic, because knowledge, as the product of reflection, always presupposes the judgement (originary separation), that renders it incapable of thinking the existence of unity, incapable of thinking the aesthetic ideal."¹⁴¹ In this quotation it is noticeable that the second (negative) meaning of 'aesthetic' slides into the first (positive) meaning, whereby the aesthetic becomes an ideal of the understanding, the utopia of a sensible representation of unity.

The moment one tries to know or to posit the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ (the aesthetic unity, or aesthetic essence), one makes it into the I (into Fichte's absolute I). By reflecting upon and positing his ultimate nature, this nature is divided, and then after the division its undivided character is restored by unification; a process in which, as it were, the Being of division is presupposed; it is the most incomplete concept. *Εν και Παν*.¹⁴²

If Being (that is, not the relative unity of synthesis, according to Sinclair, but absolute 'oneness')¹⁴³ were not presupposed by the division, then it could not be read as "the proposition 'I am I'."¹⁴⁴ In order to find myself and nothing else in the other related term, then the unity that is negated by the form of judgement has to persist in the form of a postulate, ("reflection upon limits is only possible under the condition of unity as an ought").¹⁴⁵ Sinclair declines

to follow the path of Jacobi, who relied upon a 'feeling' to which absolute unity as such is supposed to be given.¹⁴⁶ That would amount to abandoning consciousness for transcendent explanations.¹⁴⁷ Philosophy cannot go beyond reflection, or beyond whatever can discursively be redeemed within reflection "as a reaction" against it. This does not mean that philosophy's discovery of the relative unity of self-consciousness cannot rationally motivate its demand for absolute unity: hence the warrant for the postulate of unity lies in the fact that "reflection (. . .) reflects upon itself";¹⁴⁸ hence philosophy comes to know the formal rules which prevent it from grasping the thought of the absolute, at the same time as it comes to comprehend the indispensability of the absolute, as a warranted presupposition.¹⁴⁹

Sinclair's philosophic and aesthetic *raisonnements* (ratiocinations) concur in a most surprising manner with the deliberations of Friedrich von Hardenberg-Novalis, which were written either simultaneously or only a few months earlier, and which are known to us as the *Studies on Fichte*. They date back to just after Hölderlin's notes on "Judgement and Being," that is to say between autumn 1795 and early 1796. Once again I can only offer a résumé of the work.

Along with Hölderlin and Sinclair, the first independent thought of Novalis begins with a reflection upon the form of judgement. As with the Savoyard vicar, and with the author of *The Critique of Pure Reason*,¹⁵⁰ what is at issue is the meaning of the copulative 'is'. The 'is' identifies one thing with another, if only relatively. The verb 'to be' in this case really means 'to be identical'. In order to explicate the identity, as expressed in a judgement, we must step outside it, explains Novalis. "We leave the *identical* [,] in order to explicate it."¹⁵¹ In other words the Being of the original identity is transformed or rather transfigured in the act of synthesis. This act transmits the identity to consciousness (by means of judgements or concepts, which latter are just condensed judgements) but in so doing conceals the identity it transmits. The act of judgements does reveal a kind of identity, but does so by 'illusion': 'what already is, *happens*'. The act of synthesis produces a 'result' that already was, prior to the act. The forms of judgement can only ever impart relative identities to particular contents; the Being of absolute identity can only find expression as 'Non-being', 'Non-identity, Index' that is to say in forms which never fit properly, and which in fact denote the very opposite, since they substitute for, and thus fail to grasp, what is actually intended.¹⁵²

The same holds for the reflection by means of which consciousness represents itself to itself. This self-representation, however, in no way produces the self, but rather brings to light what already was: “What reflection *finds*, *seems to be there* already.”¹⁵³ Any self-reflective knowledge that articulates self-acquaintance as an explicit self-relation must presuppose a prior unity that has nothing to do with any relation. Novalis calls this non-relational acquaintance ‘feeling’.¹⁵⁴ Its epistemic status is ‘non-positing’ or ‘non-knowledge’ of what it is conscious of, and of what constitutes it as consciousness, in contrast to reflective consciousness which posits (and which knows) these same things. If all knowledge is positing, then it follows that feeling—or rather the ‘spirit’ revealed in feeling—cannot amount to knowledge. Hence Novalis gives it the epistemic status of ‘belief’.¹⁵⁵ We believe what we cannot know, but what must be presupposed by all knowledge. Thus belief is anything but unfounded.¹⁵⁶ If it is true, however, that the supreme ‘Being’ overtakes our faculty or cognition, then how is it that we can be conscious of it? Still true to the deepest conviction of Kantian and Fichtean criticism, Novalis devotes a whole series of deliberations to this very question, deliberations that may properly be called works of genius, given their originality and their effective history. These deliberations inaugurated a new and independent avenue of idealist speculation that led ultimately to the overcoming of idealism. Let me once again just sketch out his train of thought.

What triggered off Novalis’ thought experiment was a consideration of the meaning of the word ‘reflection’. Reflection means mirroring, and every image which is mirrored is inverted. When I hold an object in front of a mirror, right is reflected as left and left as right; moreover the rays of light that fall onto the surface of the mirror seem to be coming out of the mirror, in the opposite direction.

Now, Novalis asks himself: Does the reflection that we call self-consciousness behave differently? In fact, despite Fichte’s protestations to the contrary, even intellectual intuition consists in consciousness’ return into itself, since what is in the final analysis one and the same, appears as the duality of intuition and concept. On the other hand, *there is* something similar to intellectual intuition, and what is more, it constitutes the highest form of consciousness that we can achieve. But then the identity appears to give way to the manifest relation between intuition and concept; the identity is no longer a content of

consciousness. In intellectual intuition (Novalis like Hölderlin uses the neologism *intellektuale* instead of *intellektuelle*) we experience a perpetual failure to grasp the absolute that we aim for. But our aim, or rather our longing for the absolute, is itself the essence of intellectual intuition. What is intended has to be held separate from what is in fact achieved. Intellectual intuition aims to depict a seamless unity, with no distinction between subjective and objective poles, but this representation can only be brought about as the reciprocal play between two reflexes, as reflection. Intellectual intuition is thus characterised by a tension: when it aims for the absolute, as that which it can never grasp, then the absolute becomes the point of departure and the intentional object of its involuntary reflective movement. Novalis characterises this aim as the “illusory striding from the finite to the infinite,” hence from the ‘I’ (qua determinate intellectual intuition) to that in the ‘I’ which exceeds the ‘I’ itself; the true One, the prereflexive unity that it failed to secure.¹⁵⁷ The stride is illusory. The illusion that in the consummation of intellectual intuition we managed to step from the finite to the infinite lies in the way in which all reflected relations are turned around (the mirror image of the reflection throws the original relations back to us in reverse, ‘*ordine inverso*’). But reflection does possess the means to return this false appearance to truth by reflecting the reflection onto itself, or by doubling up the reflection. A reflected reflection inverts the reversed relations once again, restoring the original order, the one that obtained prior to all the mirroring. What appeared to tend from the finite towards the infinite is now revealed in the light of the dual reflection as the “illusory striding from the infinite to the finite.”¹⁵⁸

The point of what Novalis calls the ‘Deduction of Philosophy’ is to prove that under certain conditions we are justified in speaking of an absolute which intellectual intuition is still incapable of representing. The object of the first reflection is certainly not the absolute itself, and the wish to represent or to explicate it only leads to its polarisation into the play between two reflexes, (Fichte spoke of the ‘fundamental reflex’ [*Grund-Reflex*]): one which has consciousness, and another, of which consciousness is had. This is the classical model of reflection which is unable to explain the original unity of the self. Novalis calls the object that the first reflection fails to capture ‘feeling’—as soon as it is observed, its ‘spirit’ vanishes.¹⁵⁹ To feel the absolute, or rather, to possess a prereflexive intuition of the absolute, is not at all akin to objectifying, knowing, hence representing (or positing) the absolute. Feeling, for Novalis

is a type of receptive consciousness to which something must be given.¹⁶⁰ “The limits of feeling are the limits of philosophy.”¹⁶¹ It is towards this kind of consciousness that the view of the first of the two reflections is directed. Such reflection, taken as a cognitive mode of positive or positional knowledge, would have to be termed a reflection upon non-knowledge, and this reflection is only achieved at the price of the retreat or withdrawal of the absolute within the feeling (of the original intuition). But the second reflection is directed towards just this lack of Being that opens up within originary intuition at the very moment of its objectification. The second reflection makes clear that the mode of consciousness proper to the initial one was in fact not-knowing. What distinguishes the second from the first is that it is no longer merely reflection upon a state of original not-knowing, but not-knowing that reflects upon itself, that is, that knows itself as such. Philosophy must be content with this *docta ignorantia*. Only the inexplicable fecundity of meaning, proper to a work of art, can show positively what cannot be definitively resolved by knowledge. In this way the work of art remains the only available medium of representing the unrepresentable.¹⁶²

Even within the context of contemporary theories of reflection and self-consciousness Novalis’ attempted solution to the problem is unusual. Those who are suspicious of Novalis’ highly speculative imagination would do well to remember that his ideas were not intended for publication, and that he was a young man, who had just turned twenty-three at the time, and who had studied law and geology, and not philosophy. But we can ignore the form of his deliberations and turn instead to the question that Novalis addressed, namely: how can we speak of the absolute, when awareness of the impossibility of achieving a concrete knowledge of the absolute is built into its very concept? Knowing is a cognitive operation which in the understanding of the early romantics proceeds by means of relations, and in the case of self-knowing the relation assumes the form of reflection. In a reflexive relation two different entities are related to a unity. But this unity is lost in the moment of its representation, or strictly speaking remains beyond all representation.

We could endorse the Kantian conclusion that this unity, as a transcendent unity, can never become a theme for our finite faculty of cognition. However, this conclusion would be premature, since we cannot do without this absolute unity, even if we cannot explicitly represent it. In actual fact reflection does

not reveal to us a consciousness of endless diremption, but, in the medium of the specular play of two reflected images, evinces an acquaintance with a complete unity whose completeness eludes us. Fichte was hard on the heels of Novalis' finding, but the expression 'intellectual intuition' with which he hoped to grasp it was still caught up in the reflection model of consciousness, still marked by the latter's unreconciled dichotomies. What is needed to escape the reflection model is a call for a pre-identical simple unity, that is binding *ex negativo* in the identity of reflexive self-consciousness, and that can be rationally postulated from the existence or the fact of the latter, that is, as a presupposition which cannot be known. The postulate of unity is rational, since the structure of reflexive self-consciousness leaves us with no alternative but to make such a postulate, although this does not mean that the object of the postulate could ever come into our purview in the form of an object. The fact that our acquaintance with ourselves is based upon a pre-reflective 'feeling' finally carries us beyond the bounds of intellectual intuition, and gives a presentiment of the opening up of a completely new dimension, which no longer enters into our consciousness, but upon which our consciousness essentially depends. Instead of being understood as intentional self-positing, consciousness comes to grasp itself as the opening up of an anonymous dimension, a dimension in which it gains access to itself, but for which it is no longer responsible. Novalis calls this other dimension 'Being'.¹⁶³ In every self-acquaintance there is an opening up of Being whose circumambient obscurity far outmeasures what it can bring to light. But the subject does not renounce its enquiry here. Disabused of the idea of its sovereign self-authorship, and fully cognisant of its *radica* 'dependence' upon its Being,¹⁶⁴ the subject is nonetheless still responsible for the way in which this Being comes into appearance.

Though early Romantic thought does constitute a turning point in modern debate about the foundational nature of self-consciousness, the theory of Hölderlin is far away from the hysterical thesis of the 'death of the subject'. This thesis will find succour neither in the early Romantic speculation, which took upon itself the task of explaining our irrefutable acquaintance with ourselves, nor anywhere else, except perhaps in the decisionist self-renunciation of argumentative thought. Such an attitude may well be 'post-modern', but is definitely not romantic.

V

Johann Friedrich Herbart, like Hölderlin, was also a student of Fichte's and attended his lectures during his Jena period. He, like other democratic students, belonged to the "Association of Free Men" [*Bund der freien Männer*]. Although his intellectual temperament was less well disposed towards the influence of Jacobi and although he was less prone to romantic escapades, Herbart, as Kant's successor in the chair of philosophy in Königsberg, attempted to prove, in no less radical a way, how Fichte's model of reflection remains caught up in the reflection model of consciousness.

Herbart argues that Fichte's assumption that there is a subject-object identity in self-consciousness leads to insoluble 'contradictions' both in the subject and in the object.¹⁶⁵ This thought of identity, from either the perspective of the subject or that of the object, would lead to an endless iteration of the *Self* [*Sich*], and therefore an infinite regress—Hence we have gone no way towards answering the "age old question concerning the *Self*."¹⁶⁶

If one starts from the side of the object, then the subject *for which* the object is given and *through* which the object is known, is presupposed. But then, how can the subject for its part be known, in this conception of the object [*Objekt-Auffassung*]? Whenever the subject is changed into an object from the side of a thematised subject, the thematised subject itself, remains unobjectifiable, and therefore unknown. This is so, until it is represented by another subject. If this occurs, then the same process will only be carried out on a higher level. Herbart writes:

Who or What is the object of self-consciousness? The answer must be found in the proposition: the 'I' represents 'Itself' [*Sich*]. This 'Self' [*Sich*] is in fact the 'I'. If you replace the concept 'I', then the first sentence changes in the following way: the I represents the *representing* 'Self' [*Sich Vorstellende*]. If you repeat the same substitution with the term 'Self' you will find the following: the 'I' represents that, *which represents the representing* 'Self'. But here the expression 'Self' [*Sich*] is merely repeated. It therefore requires the same substitution. If you raise the question again what does this 'Self' mean? *Who* is ultimately represented? There is no other answer but that the 'Self' is dissolved into *its* 'I', and the 'I' into the *representing* 'Self'. This circle repeats itself into infinity without ever giving any detail about the actual object in the representation of the 'I'.¹⁶⁷

There is a corollary of this type of infinite regress “on the side of the subject.”¹⁶⁸ From this point of view, what is represented by the Subject in the position of the object, is always the Subject itself as representing. In this way the represented object will always dissolve into the act of ‘representing it’:

If you therefore assume that the ‘I’ is objectively given, then it is given to ‘Itself’ [*Sich selbst*] and to no other. It is represented *through* itself. However, you must not neglect the act of this representing itself. What the ‘I’ is, the ‘I’ must also know, according to its concept of itself. What it does not know, it cannot be. It is really the representing of itself. As such a representing ‘Self’ [*Sich Vorstellendes*] it must therefore be represented. However, that which is represented afresh, which was necessary to this end, insofar as it is certain that it is a real act of the ‘I’, must become again an Object for a higher-level knowledge. And this knowledge demands, in order to become known, the same act. Again we have an infinite regress, and again we ought not to have. For here too self-consciousness knows these albeit rare cases where certain repetitions of reflections have succeeded in working knowledge into the object [*Gegenstand*] of a new observation [*Betrachtung*], it knows nothing about why such a repetition is necessary if we are to talk about ourselves at all and it knows even less about the endless continuation of the series. Additionally, the repeated return to ourselves, where we always again become an Object of consciousness, takes time. The concept of the ‘I’, however, does not allow for time. This concept, if it can ever be thought, must include in itself all this thinking of thinking. Otherwise, it would not be an ‘I’ because at some point it would be lacking knowledge about itself. We can therefore see that the ‘I’, according to this interpretation, even if it had truly found its object, would remain for itself infinite and therefore an incomplete and uncompletable task.¹⁶⁹

Indeed the ‘I’ would have to wait for the end of an infinite regress, in order to become what its own definition claims that it is, that is, self-knowledge. This would happen only on Doomsday, hence never. Its definition would remain unrealised. One would go from “what can be thought to the unthinkable.”¹⁷⁰ This, however, contradicts the *phenomenon* of the ‘I’, which is factually properly known to itself and, as Herbart shows us in the above quotation, although in principle it can be known in individual cases of finite self-reflection, nothing can be known about a complicated infinite reflection: “because

self-consciousness does not know about this development into many parts, or about such a plurality of immanent interpolations."¹⁷¹ And anyway, such an iterated self-reflection can only be thought of as a process which takes place in time, and as such Fichte's conception of Immediate-Identity [*Im-Nu-Identität*] of the subject and the object in self-consciousness cannot be made compatible with it, but is, on the contrary, destroyed by it.

Herbart, like Hölderlin and Novalis, looks for an alternative explanation for the existence of the 'I', which he doubts as little as they do: "since it is self-evident, that a contradictory concept, if it cannot be totally dismissed, must at least be changed."¹⁷² With this in mind, Herbart distances himself from the—'Plurality of Faculties' of Kantian philosophy, which also Hegel, Herbart's contemporary (and later Nietzsche) have rejected as tautological: a phenomenon is explained by searching for a faculty which belongs to it and makes it possible. (In this way a cold is explained through a sneezing faculty [*Fähigkeit*] and love through the capability of loving—*vis amoris*, and so on.) In the place of this 'Faculty Psychology', Herbart wished to posit a mathematics of the functions of presentations which Fechner, Mach and Franz Brentano still entertained (according to which even self-consciousness is a function of representations). Not only Hegel, but even Fichte, Herbart's teacher, rejected the Kantian 'Plurality of Faculties'.

The ways in which Fichte and Herbart realise the identical programme are, however, in their result diametrically opposed. While Fichte searches for a totality of representations deduced from a single principle that is the 'I', Herbart attempts to illuminate and deduce the 'I' from the concrete traits of the inner (mental) life [*Seelenleben*]. He regards even Fichte's 'intellectual intuition' as a 'faculty', and an unjustifiable one, since Fichte cannot show us a way in which we can capture ourselves epistemically within a finite series of steps.

We must come to Ourselves from the direction of the objects [representations] and be guided by them, since *without* them self-consciousness is incoherent, and undoubtedly cannot be a concern of freedom. He who finds himself in pain and distress, and admits his weakness, and despairs with himself, he certainly *finds* himself [*Sich*], but in a way he did not want to, and would not want to, if he had a choice. Here there is even no room for deceptions, a characteristic that one generally tends to associate with the consciousness of the will.¹⁷³

Unlike Hölderlin and Novalis (though in some sense compatible with them) Herbart designates the phenomenon of the 'I' not as something sovereign which determines, but as an 'I' which is always already determined. We *find* ourselves in self-consciousness, a position in which we have not situated ourselves. The states of mind that the I goes through are even less its own work. ("The judgements: I am ashamed, I am sad, I am happy are altogether synthetic, since their predicates are not regarded as inherent in the subject.")¹⁷⁴

It is now a contradiction that any determinate A that is represented would even be able to modify or diminish the act of the A's representation. In this way A would have to be opposed to itself.¹⁷⁵

Herbart's criticism of Fichte attempted to show that the object cannot be found in the 'I' itself, that it therefore has to be looked for in the area of representations, which is placed independently.¹⁷⁶ "We must therefore firstly attach to the concept 'I' an unknown object which still remains to be determined; and then we will have to see what follows from that."¹⁷⁷ Has Fichte not shown definitely, however, that the 'I' as *self-consciousness* cannot be found amongst objects in the world? He showed, for example, in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* that "(. . .) an immediate consciousness never appears as an object."¹⁷⁸ Herbart admits, "we should not neglect this (. . .)"

That is why the consequence that has just been cited is in need of the following self-critical limitation: "(. . .) we can therefore only attach an object to the 'I' under the condition that it [the object] will disappear again from the conception of the self."¹⁷⁹ But then again in want of an object "although not necessarily *the same one*, which we forwarded at first."¹⁸⁰ In this way one has to understand self-consciousness as representations [note the plural!] that are successively absorbed-into-themselves and expelled-from-themselves,¹⁸¹ and through which "*many and different* objects are alternately" represented.¹⁸²

Thought would not begin, and the solution of the problem would not be in the least advanced if we wished to remain within the circle of these two reflections: first, *the 'I' needs a differentiating object*; and secondly, *the 'I' could never regard a differentiated object as itself*. These observations would lead us to separate the 'borrowed' object, introduce it, and take it away repeatedly; and oscillation without end, and purpose. If the successive character of reflection is to be superseded and the result were to be demanded, then the

following obvious contradiction would arise: *For the 'I', there is an external object that belongs and does not belong to it.* This contradiction before us cannot be solved as it stands, by any distinction. As long as we only deal with a single external object, there is not room for a modification to arise, whereby, on the one hand, the object would belong to, and on the other hand, would be expelled by, the 'I'.¹⁸³

The object of self-consciousness is replaced by a manifold of representations that remain totally external to it:

What is revealed is that the egoity [*Ichheit*] is based on an *objective manifold*. In this manifold *every* part is *contingent* because the *other parts* still support the 'I' when something is taken away from it. I posit myself as this or that, but I am in no way bound to either, as long as I can change. For example a table can stand which has many feet. In principle, it stands on all of them at the same time. However, it could do without one of them at a time, because the other legs would still support it.¹⁸⁴

Herbart seems to assume that even if the object of self-consciousness can never be located in a single representation, without muddying the waters of self-knowing, epistemic transparency of consciousness is nonetheless possible for itself within a plurality of presentations.

Only if a number of objects are represented could 'Something' in them belong to the representing agent, namely *their unification within a 'single representative process' [ein Vorstellen]* and what will later spring from this. This must provide for the requisite modification in virtue of which the various objects can be recognised. It, however, does not characterise *a single one of them*, and for this very reason it might precisely belong to 'us'. In this way, my representation of myself would remain dependent on the representations of objects,—it refers to them—it does not, however, coincide with them.¹⁸⁵

The logic of Herbart's approach leads him to regard this unity not as a 'transcendental synthesis of apperception', but as a rendezvous for anonymous (and also unconscious) representations which he attempts to explain by means of his 'factual mechanics'. We can link this up with a more recent position which Russell characterised as 'neutral monism' when he described Ernst Mach, William James, and Stout. Consciousness is here explained as

ontologically neutral (that is without bias towards either realism or idealism) based on constellations and configurations of anonymous representations.

First, we must obtain certain objective predicates. These, however, should not be of a kind which exist in themselves since in the end this would lead us into the humiliating necessity of merely *sticking* our 'knowledge-about-something' onto it, as it were externally. Rather, this wonderful knowledge which returns into itself must emerge by itself out of this objective foundation. That is to say, in a way where objectivity withdraws in the face of this knowledge so that the 'I' does not encounter the 'Self' as any kind of determined 'other', but as its own self.¹⁸⁶

We come to 'ourselves' from and through objects and are guided by them. *Without* them, self-consciousness remains inconsistent and has certainly nothing to do with freedom.¹⁸⁷

Herbart's approach is not uninteresting—and with his psychomechanical results, he is only apparently at the opposite end of the early Romantics and Schleiermacher. Both types of approaches refer self-consciousness to something in a non-reductive manner (that is, without undermining the Fichtean discovery of the problem), indeed even explain it from the standpoint of something which it itself no longer is: "(. . .) at last we can see clearly now that this 'knowing-about-oneself' [*Von-sich-Wissen*] refers to something which is presupposed and has until now been omitted and that we must correct the mistake by supplementing [*die Ergänzung*] the omission."¹⁸⁸ We know what Herbart is thinking about: the objective (innerwordly) basis-of-representation', whose primed mechanism should take us out of the regression and circularity of the Fichtean theory of reflection in which the self is continuously encased anew in its object.

It is doubtful, however, whether self-consciousness can spring out of a configuration of elements, where none of them contains self-consciousness as a predicate. If it were to contain it, then self-consciousness would only once again be presupposed and has not been explained by something which is itself not conscious.

Herbart is convinced that all consciousness is linked to an object and that the thought of a consciousness without an object is, literally, 'groundless':¹⁸⁹

Without any doubt, when one talks about oneself, everybody (even if it is only vaguely represented) has something in mind, for a representation bereft of any object cannot be the true expression of the 'I'. First of all, we must therefore give the concept 'I' to an unknown object which remains to be determined and then see what follows from that.¹⁹⁰

In this way, our search for an object of self-consciousness is thought according to the 'model of representation'. Every representation [*Vorstellung*], according to this, is contrasted with something which is posed before us [*Vor-gestelltes*]. Fichte and his early romantic successors have made the eventual failure of the search plausible, even if one does not want to accept their suggested positive alternatives. It is impossible to ground the transparency of 'Self-Knowledge' in a duality of reflections: how is it possible to find *oneself* in the other without the existence of a trans-reflective unity, which only manifests itself in the interplay of object and subject within 'monadic consciousness', but cannot be explained by it?

Herbart then maintains that through the ingesting and expelling of the manifold of representations the 'I' manages to contrast its own unity to the 'variety-of-the-object'. Since what we mean when we refer to the 'I' is something different, something more comprehensive than what is just felt [*das Gefühlte*], such as desire, pain, and so on, which supersede each other in the objective succession of representations:

It might be more difficult to explain what it means to say I find myself feeling [*führend*]. However, what is apparent is that feeling (the objective in its own quality) such as this desire or that pain, in no way provides what we would regard as our own 'I'.¹⁹¹

Herbart admits that representation "as mere sum or aggregate" is not anymore illuminating than intuition in its unrelated isolation when we link it to the thought 'I'.¹⁹² It is said, on the other hand, that we can only attain this thought through and by the objects themselves. The process of representing, according to this, is *first and foremost* an 'I'—and non-conscious.¹⁹³ We gain a consciousness of the 'I' by tearing ourselves away from the (objective) stream of representations. Since these are certainly not the product of our freedom, it is obvious why self-discovery [*Selbstfindung*] is always associated with a feeling of involuntariness.¹⁹⁴ This involuntariness of the self-representation

does not mean that it must not be distinguished from the stream of representations. We emerge from “being ensconced in the objects of [our] representations. The predicates [we ourselves] ascribe to the states, mentioned above, [pain and despair, complacency and pride], are still something objective, although the subject to whom we ascribe them is already presupposed as known.”¹⁹⁵ We have already seen that Herbart regards statements such as ‘I am happy’ as synthetic. He therefore ascribes something in the predicate to the representation of the subject which the latter did not contain before. Furthermore, we can only experience the representation of mourning through the condition that it is ours and that we have already become familiar with it.

Therefore the egoity does not lie in the articulation of what is objective, and this is in conformity with its own concept (the I). It rather forms an opposite pole even to the predicates attributed to the I. In fact, it is these predicates that allow us to distinguish between the egoity and those predicates, despite their being conjoined with it.¹⁹⁶

Is there not a hidden contradiction here? On the one hand, we are supposed to obtain our self-consciousness from mere objects (representations), whilst, on the other hand, one should be able to distinguish self-consciousness from the aggregate of representations. The first premise—the objective or the unconscious as the point of departure—seems to be the stronger one for Herbart. Thus he says that “only this objective content can provide the reason [*Grund*] for why we stand apart from the process of its representation.”¹⁹⁷ The manifold of representations themselves “must be constituted in such a way that it can loosen the chains that would shackle a subject which only knows objects and never ‘itself’.”¹⁹⁸ Herbart suggests the following solution to the problem:

The demand that our representations should lift us beyond them and bring us to ‘ourselves’ is a particular demand which is contained within a more general one, namely that: in a certain way, what we represent places us outside of the process of representing it. So it is a contradiction to say that any determined A which is represented would alone be up to the task of modifying or diminishing the act of representing this A. In that way, A would have to be opposed to itself.

Now no process of representation, taken in isolation, as the process of representing a determinate A or B or C and so forth, can place us outside of

itself. The only possible alternative is to conclude that the different representations, insofar as they are determined as one thing or another by the various represented elements, are mutually diminishing or modifying. This is the case, as long as it is determined as this one or that one through its differing representations. So that *one* can place us outside of the *other*.

For the being of 'I' to be possible, the manifold of representations therefore must supersede one another. This proposition is the result which we will stand by. It is easy to show that experience proves this proposition to be true. That it is also extremely fruitful will be shown below.¹⁹⁹

Herbart's thought is clear. If self-consciousness is constructed by the object alone, that is to say, if it is constructed from the material of a manifold of successive representations, and moreover if each of them were to be differentiated from one another, then this differentiation must itself be a characteristic of the succession of representations themselves. One representation withdraws in favour of another, and this self-negation *à tour de rôle* of the whole series then lifts the 'I' out as that which does not drown in the stream.

Certainly someone will ask how this "representation of the 'I'" comes about if there was no primary knowledge of oneself that was independent of any representation. Either these representations are already conscious—each considered by itself (this is what Herbart denies); or they only become known in their interference (this is what Herbart assumes). In the first instance, consciousness was not explained, but only presupposed. In the latter, one cannot see how consciousness could arise from the conjunction (or disjunction) of elements, where none of them were characterised with the predicate of consciousness. Nor can one see how consciousness succeeded in withdrawing itself from the series as a whole: Neutral monism falls at the very same hurdle.

Herbart, however, takes his conclusions so far as to categorically deny consciousness the possibility of any self-acquaintance. If the consciousness of consciousness were to arise out of the fact that each successive consciousness makes conscious its previous (though in itself unconscious) consciousness, then, at each moment, the final consciousness in the series—and in this way the whole series itself—would remain unconscious. This is exactly what Herbart assumes:

Amongst the many aggregates of representations, where each successive apperceives the preceding one, or where a third takes as its object the conjunction or conflict between the first and the second—out of all of them, then, one must be last. This ultimate apperception will not be apperceived again.²⁰⁰

The early romantics who tried to overcome Fichte—compared with this absurd consequence which has reproduced the worst lapses of the empiricist authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—appear to be more loyal to Fichte’s original insight and more conscious of the problematic.

VI

Finally, I would like to outline the continuity between the early romantic context of the debate and the speculations of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard on the subject. This appears to be relatively unproblematic for Schleiermacher. For although his decisive thought on this theme only came to light in his lectures on *Dialektik* in the first decade of the nineteenth century, especially in the introductory paragraphs of his *Glaubenslehre*,²⁰¹ they contain, nonetheless, the conception of ‘self-consciousness’ as a non-reflective feeling “in opposition to knowledge about something”²⁰² and as subordinated to the absolute. And these ideas have quite clearly been developed in the wake of the early Romantics.

Can the same be said about Kierkegaard, the bitter critic of the Romantics? I think it can. This consequence is not as striking as it might seem, given that the picture of romanticism outlined in the previous section is significantly different from the cliché vulgar romantic scenario with posthorns sounding, and moonlight glimmering and with its unwarranted moral and religious overtones; precisely the kind of scenario against which Kierkegaard directed his polemic.

In principle little is yet known about the early Romantics. It has only been a few years since Novalis’ authentic speculations have become available in a critical edition. The same is true for the placing of Hölderlin’s reflections, which we could not put into context were it not for the reconstruction of the speculations by the Homburg circle—and we have not been able to obtain Sinclair’s and Zwilling’s reasoning until recently.²⁰³

An overview of Friedrich Schlegel's philosophical development has only recently become possible. The vast text, however, still makes it a tricky undertaking to form an overall judgement, since we have to keep in mind that the *critical edition* is still far from completion. Just as unsatisfactory is the situation of Friedrich Schleiermacher's work. Most of it is recorded in a wholly inadequate and uncritical manner compiled from many transcripts of his lectures. And the critical edition has only recently been published in its initial volumes, among which there are not yet any specifically philosophical texts—especially not ones that relate to our theme. We, however, have to start with the authentic records of the authors concerned if we want to deal with romantic thought. These offer a very different picture than the one which Kierkegaard was able to or wanted to construct, who in any case was not neutral in these matters.

In my discussion on their respective approaches, I wish to bring to light the convergence of Kierkegaard's and Schleiermacher's speculations. They agree already to the extent that—in contrast to Hölderlin and Novalis—they both have a religious answer to the question of self-consciousness' dependence on whence [*Woher*] it comes. Kierkegaard emphasised even more resolutely than the liberal Schleiermacher who maintained that:

Here the word 'God' is articulated as meaning nothing else in our field of language than what is posited along with the original, absolute accessible feeling of dependence. Hence, all further determinations must be developed from this. The accepted view is the converse; that the feeling of dependency arises from a knowledge of God which is given elsewhere. This, however, is wrong.²⁰⁴

'God' is therefore only one of the many possible interpretations into which self-consciousness gets caught so as to give a name to its feeling of not-being-its-own-origin. With this, a principal right was conceded to non-Christian world-views, which the religious Anti-Climacus was in no way disposed to admit.

But let us first slow down and see how Schleiermacher's analysis of subjectivity works itself through to the thought of faith. In the handwritten *marginalia* of his first edition of the *Glaubenslehre*, he defined faith as "*das im Selbstbewußtsein mitgesetzte Bewußtsein vom Mitgesetzten*" ["a consciousness of co-positing which is co-positing in self-consciousness"], a formula that almost reminds us of Kierkegaard's reflection on the self at the beginning of *The Sickness into Death*.

Schleiermacher's *Dialektik*, unlike early Idealism, does not treat the subject as a philosophical starting-point. Within the course of an unanchored experience that unconsciousness forms from the simultaneous differences and interconnections of its internal and external functions, the subject itself becomes a theme precisely at the moment in which it seeks the ground that will explain the respective relations and differentiations. Such an experience cannot be assuaged by the discovery of a ground that is still determined solely as a higher order function, with respect to its subordinate functions; a ground that at the end of an even deeper reflection will eventually be revealed as a relation of a relation which has hitherto remained invisible. On the contrary, such an experience can only be assuaged by a ground that ultimately explains the *fact* of differentiation and unification.

In relation to this ultimate ground, Schleiermacher now realises that its likelihood increases successively with experience which consciousness forms from the dissonant yet uniform organisation of its functions. Indeed, he realised that any relative syntheses which are achieved on the way only become understandable through an absolute presupposition of a unity which simultaneously manifests itself in and withdraws itself from them, without it being clear (due to the bipolarity of consciousness) how this unity could catch up with its endpoint at any point along the path that is followed. It therefore makes sense to call this endpoint 'transcendent' in relation to the level of relations in which consciousness is active. The essential law, inscribed in consciousness, is that of its orientation towards the transcendent ground, wherein the difference between dispute and counterdispute would be annulled once and for all. This seems to contradict the very structure of consciousness, since even the most stable experience of which it is capable cannot get around the fact that none of the functions that have been isolated in the analysis can be maintained in this methodical abstraction without spilling over into the next, such that all the oppositions arising in the process of consciousness' self-understanding can only be described as the temporary *prevalence* or *disappearance* of one opposition in favour of another.²⁰⁵ The unity which is searched for its own sake can only be glimpsed at the point of the interval of the 'transition' between differences [*Differenten*], without being able to escape the dimension of the relation and emptiness.

In this way the *organic function*, which is itself already a generic term for diverging and converging moments, and the *intellectual function* for which the same holds, is united in the concept of thought.

What this formulation omits, namely, that the proof that the ultimately founding instance of any self understanding can be found neither in the syntheses of thinking nor of willing but only in their common origin: This is furnished by the fact that both thought and will exhibit a twofold lack which is carried over into their respective spheres in the form of a relation (thinking-thought or freedom-necessity and willing-willed or purpose and material resistance). Moreover, these pairs are defined as mutually completing moments which are opposed to one another and hence are again in a relation (towards each other). This relation cannot avoid the law of the object:²⁰⁶ That is, the transition between thoughts is mediated by 'free productivity' (even 'receptivity' would require it in order to be recognised *as* sensitivity [*Empfänglichkeit*]). In just the same way the acts of volition require intervention of cognitive acts, so as to be able to model themselves in accordance to aims. The syntheses of thought and will have not 'failed' because they did not bring about any 'hint' of a transrelative unity, but because they were not able to ground this unity in their own sphere.²⁰⁷

"Immediate (or immaterial) self-consciousness" and "feeling"²⁰⁸ are the terms that Schleiermacher gives to this function, a function that surpasses the duplicity of willing and thinking and tends towards the unity manifested in their intertwinement. The attribute "immediate" is supposed to suggest that we are dealing with a form of consciousness in which the *relata* of what is reflected upon, and of what performs its reflection, no longer diverge—as was the case with all previous syntheses. Both functions should be thought in unison as mutually self-'negating' moments of a single and integral reality.²⁰⁹ That is to say, as moments of an action which becomes transparent to itself in its own realisation, of a form of being that always manifests its own appearance—or in whatever way one may wish to express the coexistence of the deed and its reflex. In the choice of the appropriate conceptual form what is paramount is to do justice to the fact that "here the opposition between subject and object (. . .) (remains) utterly impossible and inapplicable."²¹⁰ This enables Schleiermacher to insist repeatedly upon calling immediate self-consciousness—in opposition to the mediated one—"immaterial" [*ungegenständlich*].

Here we encounter a theory of the subject which is strongly reminiscent of the one we became acquainted with earlier in the context of the speculative thought of the early Romantics and Hölderlin's, a theory whose historical roots lie in Fichte. As we know, Fichte's philosophy achieved its breakthrough with the discovery of the impossibility of explaining self-consciousness with the model of reflection (in order to be able to judge oneself as the reflected term, the one who reflects must have a prior knowledge about himself). Few of his contemporaries show such depth and dexterity in their understanding of this theory as Schleiermacher. The relevant passages from the *Glaubenslehre* and the *Dialektik* actually read as if Schleiermacher had been familiar with all the most standard formulations of the recent literature on Fichte,²¹¹ which, by the way, has hardly been influenced at all by Schleiermacher.

In "immediate self-consciousness" we are concerned with a matter whose mode of being cannot be described in propositions of the same grammar with which one forms statements [*Aussagen*] about the world of objects. Immediate self-consciousness is so radically opposed to "objectified consciousness" or "knowing about something,"²¹² that any attempt to *confront it with itself* by mediating it via a representation which it can then "observe" fails to do justice to its own peculiar mode of being [*Seinsweise*].

The reflection theory of consciousness does just this. It attempts to grasp immediate self-consciousness as "representation of itself," as reflection²¹³ or to grasp it as "objective consciousness,"²¹⁴ whereby the object is supposed to be the subject itself. A theory of reflection could not explain the indisputable fact of the "self-possessing" [*Sich-selbst-Haben*].²¹⁵ On the other hand, Schleiermacher was aware that heightened pure feeling could not avoid the discourse of the theory of reflection (which he denied).

Nobody has been more perspicuous than Schleiermacher in unravelling this aporia, upon which Fichte's approach failed. I summarise his complicated thought fragments that can be found scattered through his texts in the following way: one can *neither* think the reflection without presupposing a simple self-conscious identity (otherwise one limb of the relation could not be certain of seeing in the other *itself* rather than just the other limb). *Nor* can one disregard the fact that this identity is not immediately present itself, but has to call upon the other—the other linked *relata*—as a witness for it to be identical to itself. As we have seen, Hölderlin had depicted the aporia in

1794/5. Fichte, to whom he refers, did indeed discover that the evidence of the other must be authenticated by a pre-reflexive knowledge of one's own identity. But he also became entangled in a circle. He explains in his lectures *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* that the determinacy of the thought 'I' (its concept) is linked to the *difference* between at least two mutually differentiated expressions ("You think the 'I', and hence you think nothing else; you therefore do not think the 'Not-I'"), for a thought can only have conceptual distinction when it can delimit itself negatively against everything that it is not. Fichte called this differential basis of all conceptual knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] "the law of reflection in all our cognition." On the other hand, we have to get around the diremption of the two links by means of an immediate intuition [*Anschaung*] of their non-separation, otherwise the other is no longer the same as the one, and the indispensable identity of the thought 'I' has been lost.

This explanation gets us nowhere. The fact that the 'I' is exhausted by the other becomes its own condition of possibility. Even if it denies the ground of its own differentiation, the self is still split into two. The path from the reflected term to the reflecting leads through a mediation that cannot be circumvented.

The question now becomes: how can the thought of insuperable (and conceptually unavoidable) mediation be reconciled with that of necessary immediate familiarity? Schleiermacher has an ingenious answer to this question. What is made clear to immediate self-consciousness, when it flickers to and fro between the two poles of the reflexive split, is not the consciousness of the perfection of superreflexive identity, but rather *the negative consciousness, that is, its lack*.

He always says that self-consciousness crosses the empty space of an "absent unity"²¹⁶ in the moment of "transition"²¹⁷ from what is reflected to that which reflects. Since the self cannot ascribe this lack to its own activity, it must recognise it as an effect caused by a "transcendent certainty" [that is beyond its power].²¹⁸ This again can only be expressed by means of a "transcendent ground." It is (positively) "determined" even before it starts to determine itself (actively). In other words, (and here I will combine various citations from Schleiermacher), "feeling" has access to itself precisely because it reads the imprint [*Prägemal*] of its "transcendent determination"²¹⁹ as an indication of an identity which "supplements the defect"²²⁰ inscribed in reflection. Roughly speaking this is the conclusion reached by the "Analysis of Self-Consciousness

in Relation to the co-positeness [*Mitgesetztheit*] of an Other,"²²¹ and which leads it into the religious disposition of assuming a "feeling of dependency as such [*schlechthinig*]" with respect to a "whence" [*woher*] to which it owes its determination as immediate self-consciousness, a determination which it cannot attribute to *itself* as its own achievement. "Its power is broken" upon this facticity of unavailable self-mediation.²²²

Schleiermacher attempted to capture this 'crisis of the subject' with the following formulation. In self-consciousness the Ideal- and the Real [*Real*] foundation diverge. That means that the self is the ground for its self-cognition [*Sich-Erkennen*], but not however, the ground of its being. It has not brought itself to a state of immediate self-intimacy. However, once it is there, it is just as free, responsible and spontaneous in its thoughts as Fichte and Kant had allowed.

Schleiermacher has emphasised over and over again that the predicate *schlechthinig* [as such] is the German translation of the word 'absolute'. Self-consciousness is only dependent absolutely, or in other words, on the absolute. It is not the ground for its being. This does not mean that it depends on an innerworldly or natural authority. Such a dependency, as mentioned for example by the materialists, would have to be called 'relative'.

I hope I have managed to make apparent the complete analogy of Schleiermacher's construction of self-consciousness, in particular with that of Novalis. Both authors have one and the same problem in front of them. For convenience's sake we must think of the self as a relation between two *relata*.

If we wish, however, to avoid the circularity of the theory of reflection, this relation must be circumvented through a pre-reflective self-acquaintance. This acquaintance alone could ground an identity where 'being-itself' is maintained irrespective of its articulation as relation, and hence as difference. Since this identity is no longer within the reach of (conceptual) knowledge, it can only be postulated as a necessary condition for feeling in which two complementary, seemingly mutually exclusive experiences are required: 1) that the identity must exist in order to explain the existence of feeling; 2) that this identity does not itself enter into this feeling. In this way, 'feeling' shows up a fundamental lack in experience—and it interprets this lack as the absolute which is longed for. In feeling the 'whence' of its inaccessible determinacy is disclosed.

VII

This is the fundamental experience of the early Romantics *par excellence*. We can find it again with Friedrich Schlegel and Karl Wilhelm Solger, whose theories of self-consciousness ought to be covered by this paper but which I must omit due to lack of space. Is it still this same experience for Søren Kierkegaard?

I must, again due to lack of space, draw only on one single passage from one text; namely, the beginning of *The Sickness unto Death*.²²³ Kierkegaard's interpreters are confronted with some characteristic problems. On the one hand, its author, the 'edified' Anti-Climacus, writes with a Christian ardour. A devotional writing has no arguments. On the other hand, nowhere in Kierkegaard's complete work (as far as I am aware) can you find a similarly condensed speculative remark on the theme we are concerned with here; that is to say, the topic of self-consciousness.

The book starts in the first paragraph with the famous but obscure words:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation [*Verhältnis*], but the relation's relating itself to itself.²²⁴

This structural sketch appears unnecessarily complex. Obviously the term 'relation' [*Verhältnis*], the understanding of which is difficult, has different meanings in different contexts. We can distinguish three ways through which the self appears as 'relation' [*Verhältnis*], or to use the language of the early romantics—as relationship [*Relation*] and moreover as reflection.

1) Kierkegaard explains this in the statement that follows. The self is a relationship [*Relation*] between infinity and finitude, temporality and eternity, freedom and necessity. If I had more space, I would and should have to show that these determinations, just like the determination of 'relation' [*Verhältnis*], have already appeared in Schleiermacher's *Dialektik* and in his *Glaubenslehre*, and with the same function. Obviously, Kierkegaard has studied this essential work of protestant dogmatics thoroughly, as, for example, one can discover in his diaries.

2) The relation of relationship is the self in its comportment [*Verhalten*] towards the two moments, or better still: as self-comportment in bipolarity. The self—

and this ambiguity leads to what Kierkegaard calls his possible despair—is, as we say in German (and as Adorno in particular was fond of putting it) forced to be [*ist dazu verhalten*] infinite and finite, subject and object, eternal and temporal. Yet it is never able to be only the one at the cost of the other.

How can one explain the confusing duplication in the formulation by which the self is a relation [*Verhältnis*] that relates to itself? Obviously only by differentiating between two aspects in the subject-object relationship [*Relation*], which I take as a representation of all other semantic renderings of the same phenomena. First, the relationship [*Relation*] itself and as such, and secondly, the composites out of which it has been composed, (or better still, to which the relation leads), that is, subject and object, freedom and necessity. In a certain sense one must therefore say that the relationship [*Relation*] as such is not relative. Only the endpoints subject and object are relative. In this way it is impossible to represent the relation [*Verhältnis*] of both, in whose middle the self exists, the non-relative (or in idealist terms: absolute) identity of the poles as such. *The identity* would be the ‘whence’ of the relationship [*Relation*] just as it was for Schleiermacher. Kierkegaard expresses this by saying that man is only a ‘synthesis’ of both *relata* but not the self as such—because this self *is* the relationship and is therefore not *in* the relationship. (“In this way man is not yet a self”).²²⁵

3) In this manner we have also secured the third aspect. The self is a relation as well as a comportment [*Verhalten*] its ‘whence’, its ground. I quote Kierkegaard:

If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation is indeed the third, but this relation, the third, is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation. The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.²²⁶

Here we are confronted with the same confusing formula of a doubled relation [*Verhältnis*]. This time we are dealing with the relation [*Verhältnis*] of the subject-object relationship [*Relation*] towards that which allows it to exist as unity. This unity, which cannot be represented in the relationship [*Relation*], is its ‘whence’ or its ground. As we can remember, Schleiermacher talked

about the co-positeness [*Mitgesetztheit*] of the other in reflexivity or as Kierkegaard says in the relation [*Verhältnis*], that is, in the synthesis of the self as a link [*Beziehung*] between its subject and object pole. We can express this more simply: Every relation [*Verhältnis*] presupposes two moments. What cannot be explained by the relation *tout court*, is the fact that this duality in no way prevents the thought that what can be determined as either infinite or finite comportment [*verhalten*] is nonetheless one and the same thing, that is, the self. To explain this fact a third is needed, which can only be alluded to *ex negativo* in the syntheses, and which allows it to grasp itself, despite its relativity, as related [*bezogen*] (or comported [*verhalten*]) to an absolute. This is expressed by Kierkegaard when he says that the self only relates [*verhalten*] to itself by relating itself to another; since only this other permits it to exist in a finite relation as a *self*-relation, and not an external relation between different things.

I can see, at least up until now, no fundamental difference here from Schleiermacher's model. Both, as the early Romantics already had done, acknowledge self-consciousness' relativity as an uncircumventable condition of our (philosophical) description of it. And both add that this relativity demands that we transcend it to a trans-relative third or other which founds it and without which the relation could not be experienced as a self-relation. We have to say that the epistemological [*erkenntnistheoretisch*] aspect is peculiarly under-investigated in Kierkegaard. We have supplemented his text making use of the knowledge that we have of the texts already discussed, rather than because he has dealt with this aspect explicitly.

In contrast, we can find in Kierkegaard a quite peculiar interest in the freedom of the self, in opposition to the early Romantics. It is the foundation of his possible despair. Of course the relationship knows itself to be grounded in a third, that is, not itself. This foundation, however, does not rid the relationship of the undecidability of the two poles, between which it is swaying to and fro as if it were in a frenzy of possibility. Kierkegaard says that this despair is "a negativity";²²⁷ that is to say, it exists because the *counterpart*, the opposing half, or the other pole, has always been withdrawn from the comportment [*Verhalten*] in a *determinate situation*. Hölderlin knew this, when he despaired about the fact "that while I have the one, the other is absent." This despair about comportment is therefore the experience of an absent unity: an

absolute identity which escapes the play of appearance and counter-appearance and which would not be merely relative.

The self is essentially an 'unhappy consciousness'—without being able to transport itself into the realm which has escaped it [*das Verfehltte*], as is the case in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Or perhaps we should rather say: this transportation no longer occurs in knowledge but in and as faith. At the same time, faith has got a speculatively accessible basis, as in Schleiermacher. Only he who can contrast the being torn between two compartments *with* a condition of successful reconciliation can truly despair, just as only he who is aware of the idol of a happiness that has escaped him can be unhappy.

Thus the absolute, a state from which anything relative and negative would have been removed and which is an object of faith, remains for ever present in spite of its withdrawal. Kierkegaard alludes to this when he refers to the peace and the equilibrium which compartment cannot achieve by itself.²²⁸ It is the point of transition or indifference of Schleiermacher's *Dialectic*, which has also here aided Kierkegaard's thinking.

Now one might say: it is *this* which forms the actual despair of the Kierkegaardian self, since it cannot rid itself of the condition of negativity and can therefore not move across into the absolute. Like Tantalos, in the way in which his food is constantly withdrawing from his outstretched hands, the self is condemned to remain in a 'passion inutile'.

Two things can be said about this: Firstly, Kierkegaard—or at least the edifying author Anti-Climacus—is Christ, and despair is a test that should not be interpreted as an insurmountable *conditio humana* as did his later (atheist) pupil Sartre. The leap from despair into belief lends a new meaning to the negativity of the relation. It only lacked this meaning as long as it remained encapsulated within the duality of reflection. Secondly, it would be wrong, at least superficially, to oppose Kierkegaard to Schleiermacher and the early romantics by saying that the one remains in negativity while the others happily slid into a certainty about the absolute that has only just been gained. Friedrich Schlegel defined the romantic as "yearning for the eternal,"²²⁹ and he added that this yearning is never satisfied in a fulfilment: "Something higher [than the yearning for eternity] does not exist in man."²³⁰ Reflection has to be aware of the idea of an absolute in order to explain its relative unity

in which it sustains itself. To want to reach this unity (which Novalis, in a very Kantian way, has called “regulative”)²³¹ as an absolute is a senseless undertaking since reflection would have to destroy its goal by the means through which it wishes to achieve it. That is why our state is essentially one of a yearning; and yearning can only be experienced by a being which lacks that which it is yearning for. If one wishes to call this state despair, then the romantics would be more despairing than the believing Christ Anti-Climacus.

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Notes

¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. A.L. Selby-Bigge, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 635-6.

² Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B134, footnote.

³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴ To show this is the object of Dieter Henrich’s work, *Identität und Objektivität. Eine Untersuchung über Kants transzendente Deduktion*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1976. Cf. idem, “Kant und Hegel. Versuch der Vereinigung ihrer Grundgedanken,” in *Selbstverhältnisse*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1982, pp. 173-208, esp. pp. 176 ff.; and idem, “Die Identität des Subjekts in der transzendentalen Deduktion,” in eds. Hariolf Oberer and Gerhard Seel, *Kant. Analysen—Probleme—Kritik*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1988, pp. 39-70.

Kant himself also attributes ‘numerical identity’ to self-consciousness, for example in the chapter on the paralogisms in Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A344 = B402, A361 ff. This identity can only be called ‘sequential’ [‘durchgängig’] if it is not relationless, but proves itself to be one and the same in relation to a manifold of changing representations (for example in the temporal sequence). Thus in the schema of A344 Kant defines the unity of self-consciousness as one which is attributed to it, ‘according to the different times at which it is present’. Since this sequential unity is one of self-consciousness, it is also known to itself; or in other words ‘the subject is one and the same at different times and knows itself to be so. Its unity is a knowing-itself-as-identical-with-itself at any given point in time or more generally: at any given point in an intuition’ (Karen Gloy, *Die Kantische Theorie der Naturwissenschaft. Eine Strukturanalyse ihrer Möglichkeit, ihres Umfangs und ihrer Grenzen*, Berlin & New York, de Gruyter, 1976, p. 117).

- ⁵ I have examined this in more detail in my *Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1985, pp. 32 ff.
- ⁶ Dieter Henrich has shown the limits of the legitimacy of this model in "Ding an sich. Ein Prolegomenon zur Metaphysik des Endlichen," in *Vernunft des Glaubens. Wissenschaftliche Theologie und Kirchliche Lehre* (Festschrift for Wolfhart Pannenberg), eds. Jan Rous and Gunther Wenz, Göttingen, 1989, pp. 42-92.
- ⁷ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B141/2.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, B278.
- ⁹ For example, *ibid.*, B139 ff.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, B402: "Now it is clear that I cannot know what I must presuppose in order to know an object, and that the determining self (thinking) is distinct from the determinable self (the thinking subject), as knowledge is from objects."
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, B404, A355.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, B155-157.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, cf. note B157 ff.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, A366 and B404.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, B158.
- ¹⁶ Schelling accused Descartes of a false deduction of this kind (from veritative to existential being) in his Munich Lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*: "The *sum* comprehended in the *cogito* thus only means: *sum qua cogitans*, I am as thinking, that is, in that specific kind of being which is known as thinking, and which is only *another* kind of being than, for example, that of the body whose kind of being consists in *filling* space, in other words excluding every other body from the space which it occupies. The *sum* included in the *cogito* thus does not have the meaning of an unconditional 'I am', but only of 'I am in a certain way' namely as thinking, in this mode of being which is called thinking." (Schelling's *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.S. Schelling, Stuttgart, 1856-61, 1/10, p. 10.)
- ¹⁷ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B422/3.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, A68/9 = B93/4.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, B422.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, A342 ff.-B400 ff.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, cf. BXL/XLI, A107, B68, B156, B277, B430.
- ²² *Ibid.*, B428, 430 ff.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, B430, with B423, ('real' [real] in this context obviously means 'existent/actual').
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, B422/3N.
- ²⁵ Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Natural Science*, Kant's *gesammelte Schriften*, Akademieausgabe, Berlin & Leipzig, 1900 ff., vol. IV, p. 543.
- ²⁶ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A598/9 = B626/7.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, A598/9 = B625.

- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, A354/5. Kant also says ‘immediate’, or ‘tautological’.
- ²⁹ Cf. also *ibid.*, A598 ff. = B626 ff.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, A219 = B266.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, A255 = B272/3; cf. A374 ff.: “perception is the representation of an existence”; “what . . . is represented through perception is . . . also existent.”
- ³² See also W. Lütterfelds, “Zum undialektischen Begriff des Selbstbewußtseins bei Kant und Fichte,” in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 8, Vienna, 1975, pp. 7-38, here p. 19. Along with most other interpreters, Wolfgang Becker (*Selbstbewußtsein und Erfahrung. Kants transzendente Deduktion und ihre argumentative Rekonstruktion*, Freiburg & München, Alber, 1984, pp. 239 ff.) interprets talk of the experiential character of the proposition ‘I think’, or of the ‘indeterminate inner perception’, in terms of the emptiness, in other words depending on experience, of the pure *cogito* (in a similar manner to Sartre’s ‘ontological proof’ of the intrinsic nothingness of conscious, on the basis of reference to being). But the emptiness of the ‘I’ merely shows that it only appears in connection with the sensible (for example with the pure forms of intuition); it does not imply that what it is related to must be something experienceable (empirical). Thus the necessary co-giveness of sensation does not follow from the emptiness of the ‘I think’.
- ³³ Schelling had already accused Kant of this unintended consequence, with reference to the footnote to B422/3 (Schelling’s *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1/1, p. 401 ff.). He was entirely clear that this kind of ‘intellectual intuition’ does not come into contradiction with that which Kant explicitly rejects, in which the spontaneity of understanding autonomously generates the sensory material (*ibid.*, p. 181 ff.). I have set out and interpreted the relevant references in my *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, p. 42.
- ³⁴ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A91 = B123.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, A90 = B122.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, A345/6 = B404.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, A402.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, A366.
- ³⁹ “I cannot know as an object, that which I must presuppose in order to know an object at all . . .” (*ibid.*, A402). “In thinking the categories, the subject of the categories cannot acquire a concept of itself as an object of the categories; for, in order to think them it must take its pure self-consciousness, which was to be explained, as the ground” (*ibid.*, B422).
- ⁴⁰ Kant, *Reflexion* (of uncertain date: 1770/1?, 1769?, 1773-5?, in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, vol. XVII, 509/10).
- ⁴¹ There is also a self-consciousness corresponding to freedom; one can readily foresee the consequences that would be entailed by the assumption that the ‘I’ of the-

ory is other than the 'I' of action (with action falling into the unconscious). Cf. Jürgen Stolzenberg, "Das Selbstbewußtsein einer reinen praktischen Vernunft," in *Metaphysik nach Kant?*, eds. Dieter Henrich and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1988, pp. 181-208, esp. pp. 183 ff. Stolzenberg refers, besides the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, to the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. The unconditional law as self-consciousness of freedom cannot appear in the form of knowledge. "For it is evident, that the concept of the self-consciousness of a pure practical reason as considered by Kant must be termed the concept of a self-consciousness *a priori*. Thus it is the concept of a self-reaction in which reason does not possess a *knowledge* of itself, and therefore fundamentally unsuited to provide an answer to the question of the ground of the *knowledge* of freedom, which is essential for Kant."

⁴² I have explained this in more detail in the special issue, edited by me, of the *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 42, no. 166, 3/1988, pp. 361-82 ("Comment fonder une morale aujourd'hui?").

⁴³ Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 56. See, on this concept, the still unsurpassed early text of Dieter Henrich, "Der Begriff der Sittlichen Einsicht und Kants Lehre vom Faktum der Vernunft," in *Die Gegenwart der Griechen im neueren Denken* (Festschrift for H.G. Gadamer on his 60th Birthday), Tübingen, Mohr (Siebeck), 1960, pp. 77-115.

⁴⁴ Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 9/10.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Reflexion* no. 4336 in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. XVII, 509 f. Further evidence concerning Kant's view of freedom as "intuited intellectually" are to be found in *Reflexion* no. 4228, *ibid.*, vol. XVII, 467, no. 4224, *ibid.*, 470.

⁴⁷ Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 55 f., (the first emphasis is mine; M.F.).

⁴⁸ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B430 ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, B430/1.

⁵⁰ Kant identifies to a large extent the concepts of 'Spontaneity' and of the 'intellectual': The intellectual is that whose concept is an activity (*Reflexion* no. 4182, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. XVIII, p. 447). Thus the activity which is intuited in intellectual intuition is that of the intelligence itself: the 'I combine' Cf. also Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, BXL f., N.

⁵¹ Cf. Dieter Henrich, "Die Anfänge der Theorie des Subjekts (1789)," in *Zwischenbetrachtungen. Im Prozeß der Aufklärung*, Jürgen Habermas zum 60. Geburtstag, eds. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe & Albrecht Wellmer, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989, pp. 106-170, esp. pp. 139 ff. The fragmentary character of the present sketch in part derives from the exclusion of the 'lesser Kantians' (Jacobi, Reinhold, Maimon, Aenesidemus—Schulze, Beck).

⁵² Leibniz, for example, in his *Discours de Métaphysique*, § 34. In an even more Kantian

manner in the *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt, Berlin, 1875-1890, Vol. 2, p. 53, Leibniz writes: “la notion de ce *moy* lie ou comprenne les différens estats [du sujet].”

⁵³ Leibniz, (§ 4 of *Principles of Nature and of Grace*; cf. *Monadology*, §§ 23 and 30: “*nous sommes élevés aux actes réflexits, qui nous font penser à ce qui s’appelle moi*”).

⁵⁴ C.A. Crusius, (*Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten, wiefem sie den zufälligen entgegen gesetzt werden*, Leipzig, 1745, p. 863).

⁵⁵ Kant, *Reflexion* dating from 1769 (No. 3929, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*).

⁵⁶ Kant, *Vorlesungen über die Metaphysik*, ed. K.H.L. Pöhlitz, Erfurt, 1821, p. 135.

⁵⁷ Descartes, *Cœuvres et lettres*, ed. André Bridoux, Paris, 1953 [= *Bibl. la Pléiade*], pp. 879, 284, 287, 289 *passim*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 899.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1359.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁶¹ Descartes saw the problem, but did not perceive its disastrous consequences for his explanation:

“*C’est une chose très assurée que personne ne peut être certain s’il pense et s’il existe, si premièrement, il ne connaît la nature de la pensée et de l’existence. Non que pour cela il soit besoin d’une science réfléchie, ou acquise par une démonstration, et beaucoup moins de la science de cette science, par laquelle il connaisse qu’il sait, et derechef qu’il sait qu’il sait, et ainsi jusqu’à l’infini, étant impossible qu’on puisse jamais avoir une telle d’aucune chose que ce soit.*” *ibid.*, pp. 526/7.

However, Descartes does not draw from this aporetic observation the obvious conclusion that self-consciousness cannot be thought on the model of a representation of one’s own representation. Rather, he has recourse to this model in what follows: “*mais il suffit qu’il sache cela par cette sorte de connaissance intérieure qui précède toujours l’acquise . . .*” Every form of knowledge (‘*connaissance*’) is the representation of an object distinct from it. Once the object is separated from it, no technical term will be able to show that, at the same time, it should *not* be separated from it, in order to be, in the radical sense, the *subject* of knowledge.

Descartes’ obliviousness to the disastrous consequences of the reflection model can also be seen in Burman’s notes on the conversation which I have already quoted. Burman had asked if the reflection model did not imply that the reflected subject is no longer in the same temporal location as the reflecting subject, thereby requiring a consciousness of *having* thought to be brought to light. Descartes replies: the consciousness of representing (*cogitare*) does in fact arise from a reflection on this representing. He simply denies the temporal gap between the act and the noticing of the act, and suggests that in general the soul can represent several things at once. If this answer is authentic, it simply shows that Descartes does not

perceive the specific difference between a (successful) self-representation and the representation of an object. The former can never draw its certainty of identity from a numerical doubling into representing and represented unless the represented is already recognised as subject *before* the representation, and simply repeats this implicitly in and for knowledge.

⁶² Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and of Grace*, § 4.

⁶³ Leibniz, *Monadology*, § 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, § 23.

⁶⁵ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 252: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never observe anything but the perception." On the definition of identity, cf. *ibid.*, 14, pp. 200 ff.; for the (sceptical) application of this concept to the person, pp. 253 ft. and pp. 633 ft.

⁶⁶ Of an unknown English author, dating from 1728, Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein*, translated and with an introduction and notes by Reinhard Brandt, Hamburg, 1983 (cf. esp. pp. XXVII ft). Brandt rightly states: "the history of the philosophy of consciousness will in future no longer be able to pass over [this first monograph on consciousness.]"

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. XXXI.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. XXXII.

⁷⁰ Thus runs the second sub-title of his *Solid Philosophy Asserted, Against the Fancies of the Ideist: Or, The Method of Science Farther Illustrated*, London, R. Clavil, 1697, reprinted as a facsimile by Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1984, with John Locke's hand-written marginalia. I would like to thank my colleague Richard Glauser for pointing out to me this remarkable author and his objections to Locke, derived from reflection theory. For further information I refer the reader to his essay "John Sergeant's Argument against Descartes and the Way of Ideas," in *The Monist*, Oct. 1988, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 585-595.

⁷¹ John Sergeant, "Reflexions on Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding," *Solid Philosophy Asserted, Against the Fancies of the Ideist: Or, The Method of Science Farther Illustrated*, London, R. Clavil, 1697, p. 121.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

- ⁷⁸ Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein*, pp. 6 and 8.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; with reference to practical self-consciousness, without which responsible and purposeful action would be inexplicable, cf. pp. 64-5.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.
- ⁸² *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book, Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Everblessed Trinity*, etc. London, 1693, p. 71, cited in Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein*, ed. Reinhard Brandt, Hamburg, 1983 p. 111, n. 19.
- ⁸³ Bishop Peter Browne, *The Procedure, Extent and Limits of Human Understanding*, London, W. Innys, 1728.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67; cf. ed. Brandt, Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein*.
- ⁸⁵ Cf. esp. *ibid.*, p. 100.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8u.
- ⁸⁷ "Consciousness is the Mind's immediate Perception of itself, considered as now in the Act of perceiving itself: which is saying, that Self-Perception is its own proper Object; or that the Mind, in perceiving itself, is sensible of itself, as that which perceives, and is Conscious of itself." *ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10 n. Bishop Browne goes further, in the treatise already cited, *The Procedure . . .*, when he strictly distinguishes self-consciousness, as a type, from object-consciousness (and thus also from perception), although this does not prevent him from speaking of 'inner Perception' or 'inner Feeling': "Another Kind of Knowledge is that which we have from *self-Consciousness*. As we came to the knowledge of things without us by the *Mediation* of their *Ideas*; so on the contrary we have an *Immediate Feeling* or *Consciousness* of what is transacted in our Mind, without the Intervention of any *Ideas* whatsoever . . . This kind of Perception some have not inaptly called *Internal Sensation*, in order to distinguish it from the Perception we have of *External* objects by their *Ideas*." (Browne, *The Procedure*, pp. 124-5). However, the predicate 'internal' is no more sufficient to repair the damage done by the reflection model, than the assertion that self-consciousness does not follow the act (as Browne himself had maintained a page earlier ([*ibid.*, p. 125]), but 'falls indistinguishably within it' (*ibid.*, p. 126). Talk of the 'immediacy' of self-consciousness always indicates insight into a set of problems, even when no suitable conceptual tools are available for their solution.
- ⁸⁹ Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein*, pp. 48-9 ff.
- ⁹⁰ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B133.
- ⁹¹ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A366, B404.
- ⁹² Fichte, *Werke*, herausgegeben von Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Berlin, 1845, Neudruck Berlin, de Gruyter, 1971, vol. I, p. 527.
- ⁹³ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B132.

- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, §§ 24/35 of the Transcendental Deduction.
- ⁹⁵ Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, ed. Hans Jacob, vol. 1, Berlin, 1937, p. 357.
- ⁹⁶ Fichte, *Werke*, vol. I, p. 521, p. 528.
- ⁹⁷ Cf. *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, and *La découverte de Fichte*, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, Année 72, 1967, n° 2, 154-169, especially 159 ff.
- ⁹⁸ Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, pp. 350, 358 passim.
- ⁹⁹ Fichte, *Werke*, vol. I, p. 530, 2. Fichte in general does not distinguish between egoity and consciousness “for our self, or that which represents, or our consciousness are all *idem*. Our self is nothing other than consciousness itself” (Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, p. 350). The dangers of this dual identification have been noticed early on (e.g. by Novalis and Schleiermacher) and have stimulated attempts at a non-egological explication of self-consciousness (for example in the work of the early Husserl and of Sartre as well as of Henrich and his followers).
- ¹⁰⁰ Leibniz, cf. la conscience où la connaissance réflexive [= § 4 of *Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce*].
- ¹⁰¹ For example, Fichte, *Werke*, vol. I, p. 528.
- ¹⁰² Fichte (e.g. *ibid.*, p. 525).
- ¹⁰³ A concept is clear when I can distinguish it from others, affirm or deny it correctly, re-identify it in different contexts and over time, and so on. A concept is distinct [*deutlich*] when I can give an account of all its individual constitutive features. [cf. Descartes, *Principia philosophiae* I, §§ 45/6; Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt, Berlin, 1875-80, reprinted Hildesheim 1983, vol. IV, 422.]
- ¹⁰⁴ Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, pp. 357/8.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 368.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 359.
- ¹⁰⁷ Fichte, *Werke*, vol. I, p. 151.
- ¹⁰⁸ Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, p. 361.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 359/60; cf. the conclusion to the whole of paragraph 1, pp. 360-7.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 358.
- ¹¹¹ Fichte, *Werke*, vol. I, p. 111/tr. *Science of Knowledge*, eds. & trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970, p. 110.
- ¹¹² Schelling says: ‘non-self-sameness’ (Nicht-Einerleiheit), *Die Weltalter. Fragmente. In der Urfassung von 1811 und 1813*, ed. Manfred Schröter, Munich, 1946, pp. 26/7, 128/9.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- ¹¹⁴ By hypostatizing an immediate unity that could not be explicated in terms of reflexive relations the Early Romantics were able to link up with Jacobi. We owe

to Dieter Henrich a first systematic reconstruction, using the original sources, of Jacobi's arguments that were of such relevance to Early Romanticism. Cf. his "Die Anfänge der Theorie des Subjekts (1789)," in *Zwischenbetrachtungen. Im Prozeß der Aufklärung*, eds. Axel Honneth et al., pp. 106-170, esp. 123 ff. and 159 ff.

¹¹⁵ Hegel's letter to Schelling, end-January, in eds. Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz, *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 122.

¹¹⁶ Hölderlin Letter to Hegel, 26.1.1795, *ibid.*, p. 124.

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Textausgabe*, ed. D.E. Sattler, Darmstadt and Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1984, vol. 10, p. 33.

¹¹⁸ Hölderlin, *Fragment of Hyperion* (or draught), in *Sämtliche Werke*, 86 f., Lines 127-130.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Lines 131-154.

¹²⁰ Schleiermacher, *Sämtliche Werke*, III. Abtheilung, Vierten Bandes zweiter Theil, Berlin, 1839, esp. 422 ff.

¹²¹ "Vom ersten Ringen dunkler Kräfte/ Bis zum Erguß der ersten Lebensäfte,/ Wo Kraft in Kraft, und Stoff in Stoff verquillt,/ Die erste Blüt', die erste Knospe schwillt,/ Zum ersten Strahl von neu gebornem Licht,/ Das durch die Nacht wie zweite Schöpfung bricht/ Und aus den tausend Augen der Welt/ Den Himmel so Tag wie Nacht erhellt.[sic]/ Hinauf zu des Gedankens Jugendkraft,/ Wodurch Natur verjüngt sich wieder schafft,/ Ist Eine Kraft, Ein Pulsschlag nur, Ein Leben,/ Ein Wechselspiel von Hemmen und von Streben" ("From the first wrestling of dark forces/ To the flowing forth of the first vital fluids,/ Where force with force and matter with matter are joined,/ Where the first blossom and the first bud are bursting/ In the first ray of newborn light/ That pierces the night like a second creation/ And which, through the thousand eyes of the world,/ Illuminates heaven as well as day and night. [sic]/ Upwards to the youthful force of thought,/ Whereby nature, rejuvenated, recreates itself/ There is a force, a single heart-beat, a life/ a reciprocity of hindrance and of striving"). Schelling, "Epikurisch Glaubensbekenntnis Heinz Widerporstens," in eds. M. Frank and G. Kurz, *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 151, [6].

¹²² Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, F.K.A. Schelling, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1856-61, 1/7, p. 408; see 174.

¹²³ Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, eds. Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, (dtv-Gesamtausgabe), Munich, 1966, vol. 18, p. 46, 2.

¹²⁴ Hölderlin, *Der Abschied*, ("Ach! wir kennen uns wenig,/ Denn es waltet ein Gott in uns") (Ah! We know each other so little,/ for a God reigns within us).

¹²⁵ "Die Liebe allein (. . .) ist das *absolut Große* selbst, was in der Anmut und Schönheit

sich nachgeahmt und in der Sittlichkeit sich befriedigt findet, es ist der Gesetzgeber selbst, der *Gott* in uns, der mit seinem eigenen Bilde in der Sinnenwelt spielt" (Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 18, 49 f.). ("Love alone is what we call the absolutely magnificent, that which imitates each other in grace and beauty and finds itself satisfied in ethical life; it is the law giver himself, the God within us, who toys with his own image in the sensory world).

¹²⁶ Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, I/6, p. 501, para. 270.

¹²⁷ I have discussed in more detail the relation between virtual and actual identity/difference in my *Die Grenzen der Verständigung. Ein Geistergespräch zwischen Lyotard und Habermas*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1988, 85 ff.

¹²⁸ This short manuscript was eventually published as "Urtheil und Seyn" in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. Friedrich Beißner, Stuttgart, 1961, vol. 4, p. 216 f. Cf. also Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795)*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1992.

¹²⁹ The incorrect etymology of 'Ur-teil' can also be found in Sinclair and Hegel. In his popular lecture series on logic and metaphysics (according to Platner's *Philosophische Aphorismen*) which Fichte, prompted by student request and with Hölderlin and Sinclair among his students, gave for the first time in the winter semester of 1794/5, Fichte emphasised not just the synthetic character of a judgement but also its differentiating nature: "To judge means: to posit a relation between different concepts. [. . .] This relation becomes obvious through opposition" (*Nachgelassene Schriften*, ed. by Hans Jacob, Berlin, 1937, vol. II, § 469, p. 126). *Ibid.*, § 508, p. 129: "In the act of making a judgment concepts are set alongside each other. In the originary act to which this relates they may have been set alongside each other or separated from each other." The 'division' of particular things into general concepts Fichte calls "the *fundamentum divisionis*" (§ 462, p. 124). Violetta Waibel, in her Masters Thesis on traces of Fichte in the development of Hölderlin's writings (Munich, 1986, 54), has discovered a direct precursor of Hölderlin's etymology: "Urtheilen, ursprünglich theilen; (. . .) es liegt ein ursprüngliches Theilen ihm zum Grunde" ("Judging, originary separation; [. . .] it is grounded in an originary act of separating") Fichte, "Nachgelassene Schriften zu 'Platners Aphorismen' 1794-1812," eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky, in *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. II, 4, p. 182.

¹³⁰ Hölderlin, *Große Struttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. Friedrich Beissner, vol. 1, p. 217.

¹³¹ Cf. Hector-Neri Castañeda, "'He'. A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness." *Ratio*, vol. 8, 1966, pp. 130-157.

¹³² Hölderlin, *Große Struttgarter Ausgabe*, vol. IV, pp. 253/4.

¹³³ For a more detailed discussion see my *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*, 61 ff.

- ¹³⁴ Hölderlin, "Letter to his Brother," mid-1801, *Große Struttgarter Ausgabe*, vol. V, p. 419.
- ¹³⁵ Karl Christian Erhard Schmid, Letter to Brühl 29.6.1794 in Jamme, 136, p. 9.
- ¹³⁶ Cf. Christoph Jamme, *Isaak von Sinclair. Politiker, Philosoph und Dichter zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, Bonn 1988, 9 ff., 48 ff.; idem, Isaak von Sinclairs "Philosophische Raisonnements." Zur Wiederfindung ihrer Originale, in *Hegel-Studien*, 18, 1983, pp. 240-244. The 'Raisonnements' have been published as an appendix to Hannelore Hegel's doctoral thesis titled: *Isaak von Sinclair zwischen Fichte, Hölderlin und Hegel. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der idealistischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, pp. 289-291 (page numbers in brackets above refer to this publication). Zwilling's contribution to the discussions at Jena and Bad Homburg has been investigated most thoroughly by Dieter Henrich and Christoph Jamme in their book *Jakob Zwillings Nachlaß. Eine Rekonstruktion*, in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft, 28, Bonn 1986, pp. 9-99.
- ¹³⁷ Isaak von Sinclair, "Philosophische Raisonnements," in Hannelore Hegel, *Isaak von Sinclair zwischen Fichte, Hölderlin und Hegel. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der idealistischen Philosophie*, (doctoral thesis), Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. 268.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, for example, p. 271.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 269, 272.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270/10.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- ¹⁴⁹ According to what is currently known, the only remaining item of Jakob Zwilling's posthumous philosophical works is a fragmentary draft, some three pages in length, entitled "Über das Alles" (in eds. Henrich/Jamme, *Jakob Zwillings Nachlaß in Rekonstruktion*, pp. 63-65). Unlike in the case of Sinclair and Hölderlin, Zwilling seems to have believed that the defect of separation could be cured by reflection "since [according to the law of cognition-through-counterposition] a relation contains within itself a non-relation. Thus what is related must be counter-posed as non-related, or else we must posit as absolute the relation between a statement and its contradiction" (*ibid.*, 64 f.). This thought, however rudimentary and only hinted at by Zwilling, leads us, in the end, to Hegel's positing, as absolute, the self-referential negation (or reflection). The "category of relation us such" as an

autonomous posit is claimed by Zwilling as the truly Infinite, indeed, as “Infinity itself” (65). The opposition between unity “in terms of content” and separation “in terms of form” that is characteristic of Hölderlin and Sinclair can also be found throughout Zwilling’s fragment.

¹⁵⁰ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B141.

¹⁵¹ Novalis, *Schriften*, eds. P. Kluckhohn and R. Samuel, 2nd ed., Stuttgart, 1960 ff. vol. II, p. 104, no. 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ The proviso contained in the word ‘seems’ here does not pertain to all terms of the relation, but only to the reflection which is nevertheless required, in order to gain epistemic access to what there is as such, prior to all reflection, *ibid.*, p. 112, No. 14.

¹⁵⁴ We might be justified in attributing Novalis’ choice of the term ‘feeling’ to his fondness of Jacobi, a choice that will come to full fruition in Schleiermacher’s theory of ‘Gefühl’. In his *Jacobi und die Philosophie seiner Zeit. Ein Versuch, das wissenschaftliche Fundament der Philosophie historisch zu erörtern*, Mainz, 1834. J. Kuhn, a disciple of Jacobi, has given us an excellent exposition and elaboration of Jacobi’s pathbreaking but conceptually little developed theory of non-objectifying self-consciousness or ‘feeling’. Kuhn saw very clearly the infinite regress that emerges if one wants to ‘support definitively’ the fact of ‘Self-observation’ through an ‘already reflexive consciousness’ (p. 19). For the ‘derived or reflected consciousness’ presupposes an irreflexive, ‘primitive’ or ‘originary consciousness’ in which no separation between representing and represented content can be found in the way this is possible in derived (i.e. higher-level) consciousness (35 f.). Since every explanation moves within the realm of reflection, the originary consciousness—just like imagination—remains ‘inexplicable’ (38 f., footnote). On pages 409 ff. Kuhn analyses how both unmediated feeling and mediated knowledge-of-one-self-as-object relate to each other; in other words, he investigates the structural unity of consciousness as such. He seeks to interpret the unmediated consciousness as a merely potential difference between the ideal and the real, a difference that does not contradict the actual difference that we find in mediated self-knowledge (411 f., 514). I am grateful to Alexander Weber for alerting me to the work of J. Kuhn.

¹⁵⁵ This term is again taken from Jacobi by Novalis.

¹⁵⁶ Novalis, *Schriften*, Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs, eds. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1960 ff., vol. 2, 106, No. 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115 and 117, No. 19.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114, line 7.

- 160 *Ibid.*, p. 114, lines 3/4.
- 161 *Ibid.*, p. 114, lines 3/4.
- 162 Cf. M. Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, Vorlesungen, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989. Novalis' theory is presented in detail in lectures 15 and 16.
- 163 Novalis, *Schriften*, p. 107, No. 3.
- 164 Cf. Novalis, *Schriften*, p. 259, nos. 508; p. 528, no. 21.
- 165 Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft, neu gegründet aus Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik*, Erster, synthetischer Theil, Königsberg, Unzer, 1824, mainly pp. 93-112; also in J.F. Herbart: *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by G. Hartenstein, Vol. 5, *Schriften zur Psychologie*, Erster Teil, Leipzig, 1850 ff. (All my citations refer to the latter edition).
- 166 Herbart, *Sämtliche Werke*, pp. 27, 275.
- 167 *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- 168 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 169 *Ibid.*, pp. 275/6.
- 170 *Ibid.*, § 29, p. 284.
- 171 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 172 *Ibid.*, § 28, p. 281.
- 173 *Ibid.*, pp. 284/5.
- 174 *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- 175 *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 176 *Ibid.*, § 28.
- 177 *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- 178 Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, p. 362.
- 179 Herbart, *Sämtliche Werke*.
- 180 *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- 181 *Ibid.*, p. 283, Middle. The 'objects' to which Herbart here refers are, as he warns "not real [reale] objects, but merely represented ones, as such [sondern bloße Vorgestellte, als solche]," 29, p. 284.
- 182 *Ibid.*
- 183 *Ibid.*
- 184 *Ibid.*
- 185 *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- 186 *Ibid.*, § 27, p. 278.
- 187 *Ibid.*, § 29, p. 284.
- 188 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- 189 *Ibid.*, § 29, p. 284.
- 190 *Ibid.*, § 28, p. 281.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, § 28, p. 284.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, § 29, p. 284.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 284/5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 285/6.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Section II, part. II, chapter 5, § 199. Franz Brentano quotes this passage in order to exemplify the absurdities one encounters if one believes that consciousness is originally unconscious, and therefore maintains that our knowledge of it is based on a later act of reflection [*Reflexions-Akt*] (*Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Erster Band, 2. Buch, Kap. II ["About inner consciousness"], p. 7 [= p. 175]). This absurd theory which we have already encountered with John Sergeant, in a very caricatured form, is nowadays promoted by Niklas Luhmann. Like John Sergeant—and indeed already Thomas von Aquin (*Summ. teol.* P. I., Q. 78, A.4, ad 2; Q. 87. A.3 and ad 3; Q 87, A.3,2 and ad 2.)—he interprets the act of making conscious the (originally unconscious) consciousness as an 'observation': A consciousness relates to another (previous) mode of observation and does not only make it conscious, but also encapsulates it as an object of a 'self-reference' [*Selbstreferenz*] (Niklas Luhmann, "Die Autopoiesis des Bewußtseins" in eds. A. Hahn and V. Knapp, *Selbstthematization und Selbstzeugnis: Bekenntnis und Geständnis*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, pp. 25-94). The obvious circularities of such an explanation have been brought to light and criticised by Véronique Zanetti, "Kann man ohne Körper denken? Über das Verhältnis von Leib und Bewußtsein bei Luhmann und Kant," in eds. Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht und Ludwig Pfeiffer, *Materialitäten der Kommunikation*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1988, pp. 280-294.

²⁰¹ Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, 1st edition 1821, 2nd edition 1830.

²⁰² *Der christliche Glaube, nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*. 7. Auflage. Aufgrund der 2. Auflage und kritischer Prüfung des Textes neu herausgegeben von Martin Redeker. II Bände. Berlin, 1960 [cited *Glaubenslehre*], I. 16 bottom.

²⁰³ Cf. Dieter Henrich, "Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein. Eine Studie zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Idealismus," in *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch*, 14, 1965/66, pp. 73-96; Hannelore Hegel, *Isaak von Sinclair zwischen Fichte, Hölderlin und Hegel. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der idealistischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1971 (Sinclair's 'Philosophische Raisonnements', pp. 243-283); Dieter Henrich and Christoph

Jamme, eds., *Jakob Zwillings Nachlaß. Eine Rekonstruktion*, in *Hegel Studien*, Beiheft, 28, Bonn 1986, pp. 9-99, and *Isaak von Sinclair. Politiker und Dichter zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, Anhand von Originaldokumenten dargestellt von Christoph Jamme, Bonn, 1988, esp. 23 ff., 48 ff.

²⁰⁴ Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, I, pp. 28/29.

²⁰⁵ This is not a fundamental theorem of Schleiermacher's thought that can be found everywhere in his work.

²⁰⁶ Cf. F. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. by Rudolf Odebrecht, Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1942, pp. 265-267 (XLVI) and pp. 283/4 (L). I quote from this edition which is based on rewritten lecture notes of the Dialektikkollegs from 1822 by referring to *Dial 0*. I use the abbreviation *Dial J* when citing from Schleiermacher's handwritten *Nachlaß* of all Dialektikkollegs (*Dialektik*, III/4,2, ed. L. Jonas, Berlin, Reimer, 1839).

²⁰⁷ Schleiermacher, *Dial 0*, 284 (= L): "When we refer to the degree of failure, then we have, however, not failed to experience the transcendent ground, indeed we have achieved this through both functions. However, we have failed to bring this transcendent ground to a unity of real consciousness. We gain it, however, only insofar as we recognize the inadequacy of the onesided and divided forms."

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 286 ff., *Glaubenslehre*, 14 ff. The two terms do not mean exactly the same, although Schleiermacher does not always emphasise their difference. I will neglect the difference in this context.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

²¹¹ I am here thinking especially of Dieter Henrich's already cited work *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht*. Nearly all the important comments about the problematic of self-consciousness in Fichte are present in this little book.

²¹² Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, § 3, p. 2, with a hand-written note.

²¹³ Schleiermacher, *Dial 0*, p. 288, *Glaubenslehre*, § 3, p. 2, hand-written note.

²¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, I, § 8, p. 52.

²¹⁵ Schleiermacher, *Dial 0*, p. 288.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Dial 0*, p. 290, = *Dial J*, p. 420 = SLI.

²²⁰ Schleiermacher, *Dial 0*, p. 287; cf. also pp. 290 and 295/6.

²²¹ Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, I, p. 24.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²²³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (published 1849). I am quoting from the dtv-edition, Munich, 1976 (hence from the translation by W. Rest) cited here under

the title *Die Krankheit zum Tode*. My interpretation adopts gratefully the consequence which Günter Figal was first to point out, *Die Freiheit der Verzweiflung und die Freiheit des Glaubens. Zu Kierkegaards Konzeption des Selbstseins in der "Krankheit zum Tode"* in *Kierkegaardiana XIII*, København, 1984, 11-23. Obviously I emphasise, in contrast to Figal, the structural homology of Kierkegaard's account of the independent self with that of the early romantics.

- ²²⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, p. 31; *The Sickness unto Death*, p. 13. For a complete reference: This translation has been taken from: *The Sickness unto Death, a Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, by Søren Kierkegaard, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, 1980.
- ²²⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *ibid.*
- ²²⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, 31 f., *The Sickness Unto Death*, pp. 13/14.
- ²²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, p. 69.
- ²²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Die Krankheit zum Tode*, p. 32.
- ²²⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, (*critical edition* of his works, eds. Ernst Behler, et al., Munich-Paderborn-Vienna, Schöningh, 1958 ff., vol. XVIII, m 418, No. 1168, already XII, 7/8.
- ²³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. XII, p. 7.
- ²³¹ Novalis, *Schriften*, II, 451 f., 454 f.

Daniel J. Hoolsema

Manfred Frank, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy: Prolegomena to a French-German Dialogue

ABSTRACT

This essay works to set up a debate between the German philosopher Manfred Frank and the French philosophers Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy. At stake in the debate is the concept of freedom. The essay begins by explaining Frank's subject-based concept of freedom and then it presents the perfectly opposed non-subjective ontological concept of freedom that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy forward. In the end, in the interest of threading a way through this impasse, and following the cue of these three philosophers, we turn to the early German Romantics Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel to help us reconceptualise freedom. Following their cue, I draw on the strengths of Frank and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy while avoiding their dangerous extremes.

KEYWORDS: freedom, Frank, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, German Romanticism

Introduction

In lecture one of his book, *What Is Neostructuralism?* Manfred Frank invites his philosopher colleagues in France to join him in a dialogue.¹ At stake in the debate he would initiate is nothing less momentous than the

survival of the discourses of the human sciences, in particular philosophy and literature. From Frank's perspective, these discourses and their capacity to give expression to human consciousness, freedom, and ethical awareness stand under the serious threat of domination by enemies of subjective autonomy. The most egregious offenders here are the eliminative materialists such as Dennett, Lewis, and Rorty who drive home the thesis that the subject is utterly determined by the material substrate that forms the platform for its conscious being; lent powerful support by science's histological techniques, the force of the physicalist's thesis seems irresistible.

Hence Frank's invitation to his French colleagues. It comes more or less in the form of a question: why throw in with the enemy? Their respective differences aside, those he calls 'neostructuralists' such as Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault all underwrite the 'death' of the subject and thereby only accelerate the physicalist's univocal affirmation of human heteronomy. Rather than facing off against each other in opposing camps, the two ought to form a united front and formulate potent new discourses that would defend human freedom and the possibility of ethics, not to mention the survival of philosophy itself.

Unfortunately, Frank's worthy and generous gesture has only met with silence. Of course, many have engaged with the current crisis of the subject. However, these discussions tend to remain bounded by the Rhine: French speaking to French, Germans speaking to Germans, the English and Americans falling in with one side or the other, while silence reigns between.² Meanwhile, the crisis of the subject deepens.

Acting in the spirit of Frank's gesture, my aim in this essay is to give impetus to the French to respond to Frank's offer. In order to do so, I will work to pinpoint a specific issue on which the two sides can square off and thereby spark a debate. The common ground on which the two will meet is, as it turns out, early German Romantic literature and the contended issue we will find there at the heart of Romanticism is freedom. Freedom is the fissure that cleaves the Germans and the French, dividing even as it draws them together. Re-evaluating early German Romantic literature will reveal not only the origin of the concept of the subject each forwards, but also the re-conception of freedom for which both the Germans and the French call. First from Frank's point of view, and then from the perspective opened by Philippe Lacoue-

Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, we will re-examine the place of origin and come to some clarity on how the Romantics conceived of freedom. In short, discovering the fissure on which the two can agree to disagree seems like a good place to start a dialogue.

Knowledge Based on Familiarity

The starting point of Frank's philosophy of subject is easy to identify: he begins with the self-conscious subject. Frank stakes the following claim, "I espouse the realistic position that self-consciousness *exists*."³ This claim is the *sine qua non* of Frank's entire philosophical enterprise. And as we learn, a lot of weight rests on its shoulders: the survival of philosophy, the freedom of the subject, and the possibility of ethics.⁴ Frank's defence of his thesis sets it off from traditional efforts that almost invariably have tried to establish the self-consciousness of the subject based on a conceptual grasping of itself. The flaw in this strategy becomes clear when we recognise that such determinate knowledge demands that the subject represent itself to itself (*sich vorstellen*). This traditional model of reflexivity fails because it begs the very principle it sets out to establish. There is no exiting the vicious circle in which this effort locates the subject, because someone (who is already self-conscious) must posit in herself the principle of self-consciousness, lest the person 'in the mirror' forever remain a stranger. From Frank's perspective, the history of the philosophy of the subject shows a protracted struggle on the part of philosophers who try to unite the two *Grenzpole* (roughly speaking—subject and 'object') that inevitably emerge when a subject pursues determinate knowledge of itself.⁵

In place of this self-defeating model, Frank postulates that the self-consciousness of the subject is based on an experience or feeling (*Gefühl*) of familiarity the subject has of itself that is immediate, unitary, and precognitive. This move on Frank's part shows that he has learned well the lesson taught by the *petitio principii* charge. Any effort on the part of the subject to grasp conceptually its own self-awareness forms a scission between this self-awareness and the thinking self and thus involves the self straightaway in the above-described vicious cycle. Instead, Frank describes a subject that knows itself based on a feeling that is defensible only because it remains undetermined (*unbedingt*).

Now, one would like to know some more specifics about this originary feeling from Frank. However, other than providing a number of synonyms for it, Frank says almost nothing about this feeling. Then again, this silence on this issue should come as no surprise, since, as such, the feeling remains undetermined, which is to say, *pre-linguistic*. Frank is of course well aware of this point that the subject is older than its words. In the following passage from an article titled (revealingly) "The Subject *v.* Language" Frank writes, "I maintain . . . that self-consciousness is not only a form of knowledge but also a prelinguistic entity."⁶

This now sets up a rather interesting dilemma for Frank. On the one hand, he cannot in fact *say* what he is talking about. But he goes to great lengths to make just this point. In fact, in the interest of defending the subject against those (French) attackers who claim that the subject derives its self-consciousness from language, Frank painstakingly severs lines of connection between the subject's self-awareness and its language.⁷ He works hard to defend this idea: "the self that is familiar with itself does not accomplish any self-identification . . ."⁸ On the other hand, however, Frank *must* write a defence of this subject. Powerful minds at large working hard on their side to 'explain away' the subject. Neostructuralists such as Derrida are busy staging powerful arguments that press the thesis that the subject is utterly entailed within and therefore 'subject to' its language.

It is important to perceive this dilemma in which Frank finds himself in order to understand his strategy for defending the subject as it appears both in philosophy and in poetry. The challenge is to write a defence of a subject who cannot speak of or for itself. The best way to arrive at an understanding of Frank's *modus operandi* will be to study an example of his work and then to draw conclusions afterward about how he goes about defending a prelinguistic entity, or, simply stated, of saying the unsayable. The example we will rehearse is the one Frank stages on behalf of the subject against the eliminative materialists.

The threat this camp poses to the subject seems to be the most worrisome one for Frank, perhaps because these thinkers have science working on their side. Science's histological techniques continue to drive home the seemingly irrefutable thesis that electrochemical activity along neural pathways conditions all conscious phenomena and thus that all phenomenal events are directly

caused by a material substrate. The copula in the material-mental relationship is presently cloaked in darkness. However, the scientist believes that this blind spot will eventually give way to the piercing light of scientific inquiry, and when it does, science will reveal that nothing in the human mind escapes the same blind laws of necessity which govern the configuration and movement of all the rest of the waves and particles that make up and ripple through our physical universe. Frank's response to the physicalist goes something like this.

He agrees that if science were to reveal the heart of the mystery of consciousness, then the bad dream would begin. The possibilities of philosophy, ethics, and human freedom would all fall like dominoes. However, Frank responds, as matters stand, that consciousness *is* in fact a blind spot in science's field of vision; it cannot grasp or *see* consciousness *as such* occurring. This much the scientist concedes. Frank then stakes the claim that cognitive closure will *never* snap shut around consciousness. This claim is given its force by the fact that we *are* conscious. Consciousness exists. Moreover, we are *certain* that it exists: Frank then asks, "[b]ut how do we know that we ourselves are not [unself-conscious automatons], just like the beautiful, only somewhat stiff, Olympia in Hoffmann's tale 'The Sandman'?" "The question is odd," he responds, "because we just do *have* consciousness and because we know for sure that we have it. We know this so surely that we could more easily doubt meaningfully that we inhabit a body than that we live in a conscious way."⁹

Frank then links two agreed-upon facts quickly to conclude his argument:

1. Consciousness *as such* has yet to be observed by science.
2. However, consciousness exists; we have certain knowledge of it. (This even the physicalist concedes.)
3. Therefore, consciousness is not real but ideal.

The thrust of Frank's argument is quite simple: consciousness is science's blind spot, and yet we *have* certain knowledge of it. Where could we have derived the consciousness of ourselves that we indubitably have? From observing our own facial expressions in mirrors and from these inferring that these are the expressions of a self-conscious subject. This of course is no answer, since it begs the principle it sets out to establish.¹⁰ Any effort to make sense of self-consciousness while one is locked inside the attitude of observation will always lead one back into the same argumentative vicious circle in which

Frank here discovers the physicalist argument. Virtually all explanations of self-consciousness since Descartes have been based on the model of reflection; the physicalist's is no different.

What we have just seen exemplified here is roughly Frank's argumentative *démarche* in virtually all of his engagements with opponents of the subject. He attacks the position of those who argue for the subject's heteronomy using roughly the same method just rehearsed, because all of them perform the roughly same operation—of dividing the subject into two poles and of situating the self-consciousness of the subject on the 'receiving end' of itself. Opponents 'show' that the subject derives its self-awareness from 'outside' of itself and thereby dismantles or destroys it. For the physicalist, the source of the subject's self-consciousness is insensate matter; for the neostructuralist, it is the ceaseless mobility of difference in the *chaîne phonatoire*; for Heidegger it is Being or language. And in response to all these cases, Frank exposes the circularity of the effort to explain away the sense of a self, which still always haunts its own premises.¹¹

Having rehearsed this example, we return now to the question posed above regarding Frank's dilemma of writing defences of a subject that cannot as such be said. How does Frank (or anyone, for that matter) say the unsayable? His strategy might well be described by echoing a well-known phrase from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: Frank shows what cannot be said. That is, he *shows the unsayable by staging philosophical arguments*. The sheer capacity to do philosophy, to disagree with an opponent's thesis, and to organise one's own counter-argument, is in itself a demonstration of the subject's self-consciousness. As Frank writes, "[o]nly free subjects, conscious of themselves, can engage in argumentation games with one another."¹²

This view that philosophical argumentation gives evidence of our self-consciousness makes sense in light of Frank's basically Saussurean concept of language. He posits a general linguistic domain (*langue*) that is activated in individual utterances (*parole*). It is on this domain or 'field' that Frank and his opponents pitch their individual linguistic battles. In his own articles and books, Frank engages, re-interprets, and thus disassembles and reassembles the greater, already culturally determined differential system of signifiers, and it is in this act—of stamping his own imprimatur on the greater 'syntagmatic combine', of re-articulating a (temporarily) fixed linguistic para-

digm—that he demonstrates his capacity for engaging in argumentation games with other philosophers. This is how he (and, wittingly or not all philosophers) show their self-consciousness. The schema of language (*langue*) never accomplishes a plenitude of meaning in an absolute, transparent disclosure of the meaning of Being. Language is fluid; it “remains in principle open to new initiatives for constitution by the subject.”¹³ In fresh arguments, the philosopher launches these ‘new initiatives’, and it is by re-configuring language’s verbal schema, by means of what Saussure calls a “parasemic transformation,” by enforcing a shift or movement between two tightly knit mappings of the linguistic terrain that the philosopher gives us a glimpse of the as such unsayable. The disarticulation of one semantic configuration and its re-articulation in another hints at (*weist auf*) that which exceeds any single *Gestalt*. Setting in motion one parallax on Being reflexively indicates *the* idea of the subject: self-consciousness or freedom.

As we noted, for Frank this essence (*Wesen*) of the subject hovers in its simple unity (*einfache Einheit*) outside of language, that is, above all divisive determination. However (and this point will be explained further below), as soon as the subject thinks—since it not only exists but also thinks—it finds itself immediately engaged in language. Ideas of the subject that remain pre-linguistic remain unarticulated, merely virtual; articulation—the making effective of ideas—requires the subject to enter into language. The subject is therefore dependent on language. (“[C]onsciousness as the *knowing* [thinking, determining] subject is dependent on structure, that is, of language]. It cannot realise itself without referring to an overriding system of relations between marks.”)¹⁴ One can thus appreciate the urgency behind Frank’s polemics *versus* his opponents. For, their differences notwithstanding, the one thesis that Frank’s opponents are leagued in working to establish is that the subject *is* utterly determined. Therefore, the threat grows real that this freedom denying framing of the structure of language, that is, our (culturally determined) self-understanding, could achieve ascendancy or stability. In other words, it could become obvious and therefore transparent or binding.

From Frank’s perspective, whatever name one wishes to give it, the end result of the various arguments for the death of the subject is the same: the subject is pictured as a marionette powerless to move its own limbs or lips. Call the puppeteer whom or what you will—the laws of Newtonian physics, the play

of difference, language, and etcetera—the conclusion is the same: blind determinism. And this is what Frank fears most. The actual imprisonment of our self-consciousness/freedom is, of course, impossible. As always, it remains pre-linguistic and, thus, essentially free. No encroachment of rhetoric can impinge on the ideality of our pre-linguistic free self-consciousness. However, this freedom does us no good if the broad consensus of the culture—sealed and ossified in the structure of language—excludes it, if freedom has no place in our self-understanding. Mind-forged manacles are as binding as those of iron. The nightmare could be pictured in Roland Barthe's memorable image of the spider that spins a web into which it then dissolves itself; only in this scenario, the web becomes a filigree of icy fetters the spider is helpless to break. Hence, the seriousness with which Frank plays his 'argumentation games'. "This is what distinguishes philosophy essentially from scientific and also everyday discourse. Arguments lead to convictions in a manner different from that of the compulsion of analytic evidence or causality exercised on those who find themselves exposed to them. In this I see an anticipation of freedom."¹⁵

By precept and example, then, Frank's philosophical arguments work in defence of freedom. But what about poetry? How does Frank envision poetry's role in a defence of the subject that is otherwise foundationally philosophical? Like a number of contemporary French philosophers (including Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy), Frank makes poetry, and in particular early German Romantic poetry, integral to his philosophical inquiries into the problem of the post-deconstructive subjectivity. Like Schlegel and Novalis and the other Jena Romantics, Frank too ascribes a cognitive value to literature and poetry. His inclusion of this other 'artistic' element in his own writing is not merely for the sake of adornment. Art plays a crucial role in his work; it supplies an element to his philosophy without which it would be incomplete. We need to follow this thought through, for it is here—in art—that we move closer to the German-French line of demarcation we are working to inscribe in the present prolegomena. The border lies in between two competing concepts of freedom.

Schematising Time

In order to advance towards understanding the role Romantic literature or poetry plays in Frank's philosophy, let us return to the familiar ground of

that philosophy. Recall that we begin with the self-conscious subject aware of itself by means of an immediate, undetermined feeling it has of itself. As noted above, the subject does not remain detained forever in this precognitive, pre-linguistic stage or mode of being. The critical moment occurs when this self thrusts itself into thinking, which is to say, language. At this moment, a diremption divides its original unity: the subject now finds itself divided between an experience of timelessness and time. The unified subject remains conscious of itself in an immediate, pre-reflective way that obtains outside of both time and language. However, that mode of its being that makes its ideas effective (*wirklich*) is rendered temporal (*vorläufig*). In making the move from feeling to thinking, the (eternal) self observes itself undergoing a splitting (*Zwiespaltung*) while part of itself flows into the future in a never-ending series of finite determinations.¹⁶ Once the subject determines itself, sets itself in relation to itself by engaging language—governed as it is by the primary constitutive category of time—it can never recover itself, never sublimate into unity a bi-polarity that time forever holds separate.

The importance of this distinction is hard to overstate, since it gives us a clear account of why the inaugural moment of the subject's self-affection remains forever unavailable for conceptual grasping: once it has engaged the context of its linguistic terrain in thought, the thinking subject is never able to posit a stable ground that would allow it to recognise itself and thereby to form a determinate concept of its own ground. And yet, as the history of philosophy of subjectivity testifies, the drive to grasp this essence of the self is powerful. Following the cue of the Romantics, Frank accounts for this drive—the impulse to lay hold of the highest idea of the self, to form a clear and definite concept of the essence of our being (self-consciousness or freedom).

In order to form an at least provisional knowledge of what the Romantics refer to as the "*hochste Punkt der Philosophie*," the infinite must somehow appear in the realm of the finite.¹⁷ As we began to learn above but now can see more clearly, the answer lies in time. The only infinitude that enters our finite experience is time. Although one tends to think of time solely as the structure of our finitude, it in fact divides our experience; once it has been set in motion (*ausgelöst*), it separates the flow of our lives (*Lebensfluß*) and indeed our *selves* into individual, determinate moments (*Bestandteile*). Maintaining the discreteness of the moments that make up our experience, time structures our

finite existence. However, even though time partitions, the chain of moments it separates is itself unending: it stretches forward into the future that is infinite. Time thus forms an infinite finitude (*nicht-endende Endlichkeit*).¹⁸ To say that the subject determines itself in discrete moments of time only tells half of its story, for it cleaves: it divides at the same time that it binds, and the whole that it forms is boundless (*entgrenzt*). "Time does not only separate, it also combines, although only in relation."¹⁹

Threading its way through the individual moments, there obtains an undercurrent of continuity. Were it not so, no relation would obtain between them, and the whole of the subject's experience would dissolve into a perfectly ungoverned chaos of jostling, irrelative moments, an anarchy of inconsequence. Instead of this anarchy, a degree of consequence holds together the subject's self-experience in time, and this constancy points to (*deutet auf*) that which never changes, to that which escapes determination and division: that is, the *source* of time itself, its "*uranfängliche Ursprung*," the subject's self-consciousness. The 'components' in this passage are separate, individual self-determinations of the subject in time; in no single one of these does the subject grasp itself, because, as we saw above, no single one of these moments or determinations contains its being in itself, but in the following one, and the future one has its being in the one after that, and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

Poetry's Indifference to Philosophy

We are now, at length, prepared to understand the role poetry plays in Frank's philosophy. In a way that is familiar to us from having studied that philosophy, we come to realise that the Romantic poet also shows what he cannot say: the constancy subtending the above succession to time's discontinuous structure. There ensues a finite 'proof' of the Absolute that never reveals itself, but which establishes and guarantees the entire series and its coherence."²⁰ The constancy sustained through this serial relativity marks infinity's piercing finitude: this the poet presents in his art as the subject's dearest desire—knowledge of itself.

The means by which the poet presents the coherence of time in its finite condition of dissolution is, as the reader may have anticipated, irony. Frank sees it as the best available means of demonstrating to us the power of our own self-consciousness. Irony: a profluence of time is divided by the mind into

individual moments of self-determination, severed by the mind's scissions, the flow of eternity can nonetheless be presented in irony by showing the subject's dissolution of any one of its particular succedents and its free movement to another moment, a determination it then dissolves (*auföst*) or destroys (*vernichtet*) only to move on to another and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

Irony is a form of mental agility, the self's capacity to liberate itself and move freely to ever new determinations, thus propelling itself forward into a future of limitless possibilities. "So time hovers . . . in the middle, between the active Absolute and the dissolved finitude of individual positions that are disconnected, or rather set in opposition. Through its never-ending finitude, time hints at its origin in the Absolute; through its particularity / relativity, it accommodates itself to the requirements of finitude."²¹ In irony, the poet presents two (or more) positionings (*Setzungen*) of a character which, each taken singly, accommodates (*bequemt sich an*) the demands of finitude. Each one is particular, determined, and therefore presentable. Infinity appears in the 'merry' (*heiter*) 'hovering' (*schweben*) in between the 'individual positings' (*Einzelpositionen*). Because it never settles into any one of these determinations, the movement is infinite, and through its presentation, the poet 'indicates' or 'hints at' (the verbs multiply: *hindeuten, andeuten, anspielen, aufdeuten, darstellen*, etcetera) and puts us in mind of, or gives us a *feeling* of (above: "*mahnt . . . an*") that which exceeds all speculative cognition and "governs and establishes the continuity of the entire row" of finite syntheses (*durchwaltet kontinuiertsstiftend die ganze Reihe*): the Absolute.²²

Looking briefly at an actual example of how irony plays itself out in Romantic poetry will help to make this rather ethereal concept a bit more concrete. The specific syntheses or finite determinations of the Absolute appear in poetry—most often for Frank in drama—in the form of particular 'character profiles' (*Charakterbezeichnungen*). Irony's dynamic requires the presentation of a character that is divided between two more or less contradictory states of mind or psychological profiles.

Take for example Frank's reading of Tieck's play *Bluebeard*. Here the eponymous character shows himself to be capable of penetrating, sensitive psychological insight (I.3), of expressing apparently heartfelt professions of love (II.3), and even of presenting himself as a highly self-conscious, comic, somewhat obtuse, rather sympathetic figure (II.3). These qualities can leave the

reader (or viewer) feeling dizzy, because at different moments in the play the same character also reveals himself to be cold-blooded murderer who needs little persuading to execute his enemies (I.2) and, worse yet, he needs no prompting to assassinate his seventh wife (V.4). In the end, one does not know what to make of him. One struggles between feeling drawn to identify with Bluebeard's winsome characteristics, and a moment later feeling repulsed from his horrifying acts. It turns out in the play's conclusion that neither one of his psychological profiles really pins Bluebeard down, that he is finally a bundle of contradictions. As Frank puts it "Bluebeard himself . . . glides incessantly from the demonic into the stupid, without our being able to say for certain on which of the two poles we should fix as the 'actual' one."²³ The impact on us of Tieck's irresolution of two such mutually exclusive set of contrasts is to unfix one's commitment to or understanding of any single characterisation. The sought-after effect is achieved: one achieves a hovering with the character between the two poles, and Tieck thus creates in us a feeling of levity or freedom from any one positing of this single self. The point of these fluid characterisations is to give viewers a *feeling* of that which they cannot as such grasp.²⁴ The ironic presentation of characters initiates and then refuses to arrest the ceaseless movement between finite determinations of character; the poet thus presents a span of time, time spaced, detained or sustained, time in its finite dissolution (*Auflösung*) held in check, or shown to be an infinite series of finite syntheses. Tieck and the other Romantics thereby manage to present the unrepresentable. "The Absolute governs the entire series by establishing its continuity; in so far as the series shows this continuity through this demonstrable manifestation in relative (particular) syntheses, it shows the synthesising effect of the Absolute."²⁵

We return now to the question regarding the respective roles played by philosophy and poetry in Frank's defence of the subject. As we have seen, there is *no* essential difference between these roles. For Frank, poetry serves as an extension of philosophy. It confirms to philosophy what philosophy already knows.²⁶ Poetry's real gift to philosophy is its sheer mobility. In contrast to philosophy, poetry is agile. Frank values philosophy's formulation of fine-grained defences of the subject against the arguments of its attackers. And, as we saw, by articulating a persuasive argument against his opponents, and thereby reweaving the semantic field, the philosopher makes manifest a shift in this field that indirectly gives evidence of that which he defends but can-

not as such say. Philosophy's only hindrance is that its shifting of the linguistic field is sluggish, positively glacial in comparison with poetry's. It is in both philosophy and poetry, but most graphically in the latter 'language game' that we see clearly an unmistakable presentation of the kernel that Frank wants defended and demonstrated: self-consciousness, or freedom.²⁷

Rethinking Freedom

Although Frank does not mark the event as such, we should take note that the cooperative rapprochement of philosophy and poetry that he finds taking place in early German Romanticism is indeed nothing short of an epochal event, since philosophy and poetry have been antagonistic to each other at least since Plato ushered the poets out of his Republic. One might want to ask: what was put on the bargaining table to negotiate this *détente*? Although this coming together apparently does not strike Frank as remarkable, the nearly seamless joining of these ancient antagonists at the end of the eighteenth century should give us pause and raise further questions that demand responses.

Consider, for example, that for Frank nothing happens in philosophy or poetry (or music) that does not receive its first impulse from the subject. Strictly speaking, nothing *happens to* the subject at all. In lecture eighteen of *What Is Neostructuralism?* Frank writes that the subject "is free to the extent that it lends meaning to, and brings into expression the pre-given signs [of *langue*], which indeed, are nothing other than an ensemble of appeals for interpretation."²⁸ But one wants to ask: is *this* what it means to be a free, self-conscious subject—roughly to exercise Isaiah Berlin's positive and negative senses of freedom according to which enforces one's own will and defines it against the will of others? Or, how might this free subject respond to or interpret an encounter with another subject who does not present itself as "an appeal for . . . interpretation" but who instead presents itself as a silent, suffering being who is all but opaque to our interpretative designs and desires? One might wonder whether or not it is possible for the subject to encounter in language, and in particular in the words of poetry, thoughts or truths that it does not already know. That might perhaps catch it off guard, silence it or even throw it into question? Is it possible that, in Romanticism, poetry is not only a reflective medium in which the philosophical subject witnesses itself reflected back to itself in its agency as *Ironist*, but also something like a looking

glass through which it might pass and find itself exposed in uncharted semantic regions, open to unpredictable encounters with others and with language?

My intention in raising these questions is not to attack the subject Frank defends. Rather, the aim here remains working with Frank to initiate a productive German-French debate. Recall that we were looking for a clearly inscribed line that would cleave the two, thus marking difference on which they might agree to disagree. Perhaps we have found it in freedom. As we saw above, Frank defines freedom as the essence of the self-conscious subject who can demonstrate for itself its own freedom by engaging in high-stakes language games. However, for all its potency, Frank's subject shows a tendency to isolate itself in its *ipseity*. Self-fathering, self-regulating, the subject conceived of as *solus ipse* radiates authority over the context of its being, but with an underdeveloped phenomenology of its responsiveness to that context. Viewed with an eye to its autocracy and consequent lone punctuality, this subject's freedom seems to dwindle and appear to be less and less free.

Here is where the French come in. They will provide us with a radically different concept of freedom. Studying it below we see why it is difficult to start a German-French debate: if Frank goes to one extreme in conceptualising freedom as a subjective autarky, then the French go to the opposite extreme of depleting the subject's autonomy and ascribe freedom solely to non-subjective being. As I stated above, it will be the early German Romantics who propose a compromise position in between the two—one that draws on the strengths of both and likewise avoids their extremes. For the French thinking on freedom, we turn to Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's study *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Like Frank, these two philosophers are drawn to Romanticism. However, as it turns out, they look to the Romantics for perfectly opposite—and apposite—reasons. Whereas the appeal for Frank is Romanticism's formidable gallery of endlessly ironising, freedom-demonstrating characters, for Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy the appeal lies in the Romantics' helping to birth an entirely new form of freedom.

The Existence of Freedom

Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's account of the type of freedom the Romantics conceived begins with Kant. The early Jena Romantics work to complete in

art the subject Kant bequeathed them. 'Complete' here would mean successfully forming in the medium of art a substantial (which is to say intuitable) presentation (*Darstellung*) of the idea of the subject, which is freedom. Were the Idea of freedom successfully rendered in substantial form, the subject would be in a position to comprehend it (self). In other words, the subject would gain the self-consciousness of its proper freedom.²⁹ In contrast to the Idealists, for example, Fichte or Hegel, the Romantics insist on respecting Kant's proscription of the intellectual intuition. The *Darstellung* must take place in sensible form.³⁰

However, in the event, the outcome of this effort (recorded for posterity in the fragments that appear in the journal *Athenaeum*) is the precise opposite of that which the Romantics intended. Rather than successfully presenting and comprehending the idea (*Begriff*) of its own freedom, the subject finds itself at the limit of philosophy a fascinated, detained, deposed from self-presence and consequently exposed to the force they encounter in the sensuous material—the ink on the page—in which they have figured out this otherwise purely ideal Idea. The force is freedom, here unexpectedly reconceived as *désœuvrement*, as the free gift of being that grounds *Dasein* in its world.³¹

If this form of freedom is not subject-based, then how are we to understand it? Exactly what do Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy believe Friedrich Schlegel and the rest of the Jena circle encounter there at the limit of their egocentric freedom? What is freedom for them?

Whatever else it is for them, freedom is an experience in the sense of an *Erfahrung*. This type of experience (in distinction from an *Erlebnis*) puts one on the receiving end of an event over which one has no control. An experience is undergone: strictly speaking, no one ever 'has' an experience of this kind; rather, one is had by it.

In experience one does not acquire anything, unless it is just experience itself, where being experienced is not the same as being in possession of something objective and determinate; rather, experience is always of limits and refusal . . . it cannot be contained within propositions or underwritten by the law of contradiction . . . It is never rule-governed.³²

It is obviously not a property of the subject that it exerts and brings to expression, say, in the staging of philosophical arguments. Rather, it is a force to

which the subject is subject. Experience exposes the posited subject. "The experience of freedom," Nancy writes, "is therefore the experience that freedom is experience. It is the experience of experience."³³ To withstand experience is to stand speechless in the presence of an event that dispossesses the subject of all proprietary claims to self; it leaves the freed subject free, open to the lawlessness of the freedom of existence, which is, in any case, its essence (*Wesen*).

The second feature of this concept of freedom that we should render is that it is eventful. Freedom happens. Freedom arrives as an event (*Ereignis*) *par excellence*; it exists *as* the coming into presence of being. Furthermore, this occurrence appears not as one even flat-line that delivers constant being. Rather, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write in terms of bursts or an *éclat*: "eruption, event, sudden appearance [*surgissement*], or surreption . . ."³⁴

But . . . [freedom] is the inappropriate burst from which the very existence of the subject comes to the subject, with no support in existence, and even without a relation to it, being 'itself' in the burst of a 'there exists' . . . that happens unexpectedly and only surprises, vertiginous to the point that it is no longer even a question of assigning an 'abyss' to its vertigo . . .³⁵

Freedom arrives, then, (always arriving, never arriving) impulsively, giving of itself unpredictably in punctuated, arrhythmic events. As Friedrich Schlegel and his group of avant-garde philosopher/poets work furiously to delineate in art freedom as its proper essence, here—at the limit of its self-comprehension—the sovereign subject is set free for a freedom not its own, freedom not conceived (in the sense of conceptually grasped) but reconceived: offered up, abandoned, and thereby received in return as a gift.³⁶

Dasein is, then, after all, free. However, and this is important, it has within it, the power to cut itself off from its existence. To the degree that it seeks to limit freedom within itself as an essential property, it withdraws from existence; it chooses not to be free. And on the French side a clear judgement of this decision-for-self is passed down: it is 'evil'.

If man is the being in whom the 'ground' . . . is separated from the existence . . . and if it is man who, acceding in his autonomy to understanding and language, lays claim to existence itself as the ground, which means to the 'tendency to return to oneself' or to 'ego-centrism', then evil occurs when . . . man wants to be 'as separated selfhood the ground of the whole.'³⁷

Against this temptation to make one's self the ground of the whole, the focus and centre of existence, free existence beckons to the self to give over its (in any case vacuous) concept of itself and thereby to come into the truth of its being, to enter into its real and proper essence. In other words, to be 'born' to freedom.

Freedom calls us to take our place as free beings; it calls us to the participation that will expose us to the fact of our being. This freedom is currently at work, un-working the (fatal, evil) myth of the self-present subject, working to deliver it into life, working to make it present at the scene of its own birth. "There is no other task of thought, on the subject of freedom, than that which consists in transforming its sense of a property held by a subject into the sense of a condition or space in which alone something like a 'subject' can eventually come to be born, and thus to be born (or die) to freedom."³⁸ The force of freedom thus works to liberate the self-enclosed, self-imprisoned subject; to have an experience of freedom would mean to experience the loss or un-founding of the self possessed of itself, and thus to enter into the thrownness of existence in which our being occurs.

I said at the outset of this essay that I would work to set up a conversation between German and French philosophers. And the strategy I would use would be to inscribe a line whereon they could agree to disagree. The two sides stand perfectly opposed to one another on the issue of freedom. For Manfred Frank, freedom is indeed a property of the subject, one that needs to be exercised regularly in philosophical arguments and as well in poetry. On the French side, we find Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's *eleutherology*, their argument that egocentric claims of freedom such as Frank's are 'evil' insofar as they withdraw *Dasein* from the experience of freedom and establish it as its ground. History provides ample evidence of the 'wickedness' (Nancy's word) generated by the usurpation of freedom as a property of the autarkic self.

One way beyond this impasse is to follow Frank, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in their respective studies of early German Romanticism. Both sides give careful thought to this philosophical/literary event. Or, more exactly, both sides study closely the philosophical slope of Romanticism, while giving short shrift to the literature of the moment. In the interest of fostering conversation, let us turn now to the literature of the philosopher/poet Novalis to learn what we can about freedom and intercourse.

Romantic Poetry: Novalis' Wise Passiveness

In the early German Romantic *oeuvre* it is not difficult to locate clear teaching to avoid the mistake that it appears Manfred Frank would make. In Novalis' short fragmentary novel *The Novices of Saïs* (*Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*), we read of a group of young catechumens who live in the distant, exotic, mystical land of Saïs and study there under a spiritual master who teaches them how to live well in the world, that is, how to be alive to nature and to perceive and be deeply receptive to the language of nature, "die echte Sanskrit Sprache."

Frank's error enters the novel as dissonant voices that offer misleading advice threatening to guide the apprentices down dangerous pathways. These off-key voices provide negative examples of an errancy the catechumens are meant to avoid. Perhaps the most important of these voices speaks to the novices of a seductive promise. The tempter beckons:

We rest on the source of freedom and explore it; it is the magic mirror in which the entire creation reveals itself purely and clearly; in it bathes the tender spirits and reproductions of all of nature, and we see all chambers unlocked. Why do we need to wander arduously through the cloudy world of visible things? Indeed, the purer world lies inside us, in this source. The great, multi-coloured, bewildering spectacle reveals itself here in its true sense (. . .).³⁹

The error in this lesson appears in the opening clause: freedom does not lie within; we do not view the entire creation mediately though this 'magic-mirror' welling up inside of us. The sure sign that this message is misguided shows in the exhortations that follow. Indeed, why wander through uncertain nature when the source of wonder and discovery lies deep in our heart's core? Part of the challenge of wandering in and through the external world is making out shapes, navigating through the fog. On the other hand, if freedom is situated within, the voice suggests, the novices will be able to gain a perspective on 'pure' and 'clear' imagery. The promise is thus the positive freedom to know with certainty, and the negative liberty of freedom from confusion.

In another passage Novalis offers another critique of the egocentric concept of freedom espoused by those who seem governed and guided by fear. He sharpens the idea that positing freedom within gives the one who possesses

it deliverance from fearful external natural forces. Still writing here of the source of our own freedom, this time speaking in the voice of one he ironically refers to as 'the braver one', he writes,

In the inspiring feeling of our freedom let us live and die; here wells up the stream that will at once inundate and tame it (Nature), and in it (this stream) let us bathe and refresh ourselves with courage for heroic deeds. To here the rage of the monster does not reach; one drop of freedom is enough to paralyse it (Nature) forever and to establish for its devastations measure and purpose.⁴⁰

Here nature emerges as an outright enemy whose 'devastations' must be limited to the outer world and held at bay. The braver one calls his colleagues to fortify their courage to do 'heroic deeds' by bathing in and drinking from the fountainhead of freedom. But this is all just so much bluster: they will 'live and die' in close proximity to the inner sanctum, never venturing forth to meet on its own ground the 'raging monster'.

It is apparent, then, that Novalis is not entirely in agreement with Frank: his locating freedom within us and positing it as the very fountainhead of our human being tempts the subject with an egocentric resection of its attention from the context of its being and with a fearful and fixed turn within. Meanwhile, nature, speaking to the novice through a play of *die echte Sanskrit Sprache*, goes unheeded, and he thereby halts the accession to wisdom. Freedom as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy conceive it beckons in vain.

However, before we swing to the opposite extreme and side with Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, claiming with them that we must do all in our power to leave the 'era of the Subject' behind, let us consider Novalis' more difficult, equivocal point of view.⁴¹ The clear indication Novalis gives is that freedom begins with its forfeiture (*pace* Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy) but that the gift nature gives in return is self-consciousness (*pace* Frank). Late in the novel, speaking through the voice of one of the initiates to wisdom, Novalis describes the entry into the free play of relations that surrounds man in nature as the entry into freedom:

It is most remarkable that it is in this play that man first becomes truly aware of their uniqueness and freedom; it seems to him as if he is awakening from a deep sleep; it is as if he is for the first time at home in the world, and the light of day first spreads itself in his inner world.⁴²

In contrast to the ones who harbour freedom inwardly and fear the world of nature and the encroachments of its destructive forces, this wise one enters into a playful relation with his context, with a freedom to which he belongs. The 'genuine Sanskrit' of nature will speak freely to him, perhaps whisper to him some of her secrets. But at the same time, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy should take note that the play here also individuates the man; as he participates in the harmonious attunement of self to nature he *first* becomes aware of his 'uniqueness' and 'specific freedom' and the dawn that he witnesses sheds light on both nature *and* his inner self. The world has become a home to him, and the light of day floods his dark interior.

We will close this brief study of the Romantics by reading a passage from another novel by Novalis, this time from his better-known *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In this scene we find depicted some now familiar themes: a fountain, bathing, language, and poetry. Here again, I think, we find a give-and-take between self and other that challenges Frank *and* Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy to a type of conversation whose nuances and complexity would surely exceed any the two parties alone can presently produce. Here we take up where Heinrich bathes in an ('external') fountain:

He dipped his hand into the fountain and wet his lips. It was as if a breath of spirit poured into him and he felt himself deeply strengthened and refreshed. An irresistible longing to bathe seized him. He undressed and stepped into the fountain. He felt as if a glowing cloud of sunset flowed around him; a heavenly feeling swept over his innermost being; innumerable thoughts within him drove ardently and voluptuously to intertwine; new and never-seen images came into being and also flowed into each other and became visible beings and every wave of the lovely element clung to him like a tender bosom. The stream appeared to be a thawed flow of charming girls who, touching the young man, momentarily congealed into bodies.⁴³

It is plain to see that this bathing experience contrasts sharply with those that appeared above. He is not hiding from nature; wet and naked, he leaves himself as exposed and vulnerable as one can. He enters nature's domain and it surrounds him like a second skin. In addition, his awareness of himself is heightened by the passage's open eroticism: swimming naked with the 'charming girls', who are also, presumably, naked, further intensifies his sense of self and his attraction to embodied nature. As one critic has written, the scene

portrays “the poet’s baptism in the cave of the cool, blue fountain of poetic language.”⁴⁴ Free will and free being here meet in an act of foreplay that prepares both parties involved for fulfilment.

Conclusion

In his book *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, Simon Critchley makes the following observation that whets an edge on Frank’s call to the French to take part in a conversation.

[T]he problem that we face, both as philosophers *and* citizens, has the form of an antinomy or double bind . . . is it possible to retain what was valid in the deconstruction of the subject, in Heidegger and others, while at the same time maintaining a notion of subjectivity that is adequate to our sense of self and to the actuality of ethical and political responsibility?⁴⁵

To characterise this very dilemma, parties on both sides of the Rhine use the word ‘crisis’, and still the French have refused the offer of what promises to be a productive debate. Enter the early German Romantics, whom both sides approach as students who stand to learn from their teachers. What is there to learn from the Romantics with respect to this issue?

Based on the (still scant) evidence we have seen above, it seems right to say that their lesson has to do with the proximity in their writing of philosophy and poetry. The sense of a centred, self-conscious subject who is aware of his ‘specific freedom’ aligns Novalis’ poets in *die Lehrlinge* and *Heinrich* with Frank’s autonomous philosopher/subject, one who respects the law of non-contradiction and who plays serious language games in accordance with the rules. Novalis shows us clearly enough in the passages cited above that he is well acquainted with this egocentric philosophical subject. However, Novalis alternatively shows us a different kind of play that calls to mind Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s non-subjective freedom, a form of freedom that is ungrounded and perfectly lawless. In other words, the play of love and the simultaneous give-and-take it occasions. In Novalis, then, there appears the conversing of philosophy and poetry that might serve as the type for a German-Frank conversation.⁴⁶

Before concluding, I would like to cite another Romantic’s advice on this topic. In his *Critical Fragment* number thirty-seven, Friedrich gives the following

observation on how to conduct a conversation. One can read in it the play between philosophy and poetry that characterises Romantic philosophy and literature in general.

Even a friendly conversation, which cannot be freely broken off at any moment, has something intolerant about it . . . There are only three mistakes to guard against [in good conversation]. First: What appears to be unlimited free will, and consequently seems and should seem to be irrational or supra-rational, nonetheless must still at bottom be simply necessary and rational; otherwise the whim becomes wilful, becomes intolerant, and self-restriction turns into self-destruction. Second: Don't be in too much of a hurry for self-restriction, but first give reign to self-creation, invention, and inspiration, until you're ready. Third: Don't exaggerate self-restriction.⁴⁷

Noteworthy here is Schlegel's recommending a free will that is limited, whim that is still rational, invention and inspiration that are still reigned by self-restriction. In other words, he advises self-assertion that allows for self-restraint, clarification, and interruption. It seems that Frank's subject stands to gain from the (temporary) divestiture of its rights and prerogatives, its private freedom, and that Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's subject might benefit from exerting due self-restraint. The consequence for both sides could be, as Novalis shows, fulfilling and productive. Both might find freedom in the form of a conversation.

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Notes

- ¹ "I am seeking a true dialogue with my colleagues in France. Actually being addressed are those French philosophers who would like to discover how what they formulate and think appears from the estranging perspective—and often through critique—of contemporary hermeneutics." Manfred Frank, *What Is Neostructuralism?* trans. Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 4.
- ² For an example of the French side, see Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991. For an example of the Anglo-American-German side see Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma, eds., *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German*

Philosophy, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995. Also, Simon Critchley and Peter Dews, eds., *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996, contains essays from both sides of this divide; however, because authors of these essays tend to remain faithful to the thinking of their chosen philosopher (Heidegger, Habermas, Lacan, and Levinas) as they work out their answers to the question who comes after the subject of metaphysics, they leave undisturbed the silence governing the space between.

- ³ Manfred Frank, "The Subject *v.* Language: Mental Familiarity and Epistemic Self-Ascription," *Common Knowledge*, no. 4, 1995, p. 33.
- ⁴ Frank writes, "If we renounce understanding ourselves as subjects (in a sense essential for our self-description), we cannot practice philosophy at all any more. For then that which we have in mind when we consciously relate to ourselves cannot be distinguished from physical entities," "Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity?" in Ameriks and Sturma, *The Modern Subject*, p. 177.
- ⁵ For Frank, perhaps the most poignant example of such a failure appears in the Kant. In his article, "Intellektuale Anschauung: Drei Stellungnahmen zu Deutungsversuch von Selbstbewußtsein: Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin/Novalis," he explains that Kant's succumbing to this temptation appears in B422-3 of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In distinction from the other three modalities (*qualitas, realitas, quidditas*), the fourth (*existence*) is unique, because it is able to form an absolute, non-relative judgement: 'this exists'. This mode of judgement is one of a kind, because it in no way determines that which is judged. It is not the thing's *Seinsweise*, but only its *Dasein*, its being-there, that it *is*, that is ascribed to it. Kant exploits here the possibility that this freedom from determination allows this modal category of existence to ascribe existence to that which is not real, that is, to that which does not arrive in the mind as a sensuous intuition. Allowing himself this liberty, Kant is then free to direct this category to the self's sheer spontaneous intellectuality. The category of existence perceives the unity of apperception as a feeling, and to this feeling it grants existence. Thus, Frank argues, Kant picks the very fruit he had forbidden.
- ⁶ Frank, "The Subject *v.* Language," p. 32.
- ⁷ In a rehearsal of an argument constructed some years ago by Hector Neri Casteñeda, Frank demonstrates that 'epistemic self-ascription', the so-called *de se* beliefs that enable us meaningfully to refer to our selves using the self-indexical first person pronoun 'I', are not implied in our other two modes of belief, the *de re* and *de dicto*. The upshot of the argument is that there are beliefs that we hold which are not propositional (neither *de re* nor *de dicto*), that there is a certain kind of knowledge we have which cannot be expressed by propositional statements. This knowledge is expressed by—though not contained in—self-indexicals *de se* statements. In

the following passage from “The Subject *v.* Language,” Frank approvingly cites David Lewis, a physicalist and sceptic with regard to the idea of an ideal subject, who here reluctantly arrives at the same conclusion as Casteñeda and Frank: “Some say, condescendingly, that scientific knowledge of our world is all very well in its place; but it ignores something of the utmost importance. They say there is a kind of personal, subjective knowledge that we have or seek, and it is altogether different from the impersonal, objective knowledge that science and scholarship can provide. Alas, I must agree with these taunts, in letter if not in spirit. Lingens has studied the encyclopaedias long and hard. He knows full well that he needs a kind of knowledge they do not contain. Science and scholarship, being addressed to all the world, provide knowledge of the world; and that is knowledge *de dicto*, which is not the whole of knowledge *de se*,” Frank, “The Subject *v.* Language,” p. 46.

- ⁸ Frank, *What is Neostructuralism?* p. 287.
- ⁹ Frank, “Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity?” p. 182.
- ¹⁰ The following critique now appears: “Since he [the physicalist] infers self-consciousness only from observed expressions and since these are found only on the side of the represented [the face in the mirror], the position of the object, he now falls into an explanatory circle. For how is he to see an object (or, if you wish, an observable facial expression) *as* the expression of a *self*, if previously he was not acquainted with a self at all? His explanation goes in a circle because he must already have known that which is to be explained in the explanation” (Frank, “Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity?” p. 184).
- ¹¹ In *What is Neo Structuralism?* alone, he performs roughly the same exegesis/ attack on Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals*, on Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, on Ernst Tugendhat’s *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die sprachanalytische Philosophie und Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*, on Lacan’s *Écrits*, on Deleuze’s and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, and numerous other texts by Hegel, Lévi-Strauss, Husserl, Heidegger, and others.
- ¹² Frank, “Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity?” p. 178.
- ¹³ Frank, “The Text and Its Style: Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutic Theory of Language,” *Boundary 2*, no. 11, 1983, p. 21.
- ¹⁴ Frank, *What is Neostructuralism*, p. 283.
- ¹⁵ Frank, “Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity?” p. 178.
- ¹⁶ “Aber nie wird die Einerleiheit des Ewigen wirklich sein. Denn um wirklich zu sein, mußte sie in Relation zu sich treten—und dieser Widerspruch löst ja gerade die Zeit aus.” [The unity of the Eternal will never become effective. For, in order to become effective, it must put itself into relation with itself—and this contrariety immediately sets time in motion.] Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 328. Translations are mine.

- ¹⁷ Frank, "Intellektuale Anschauung," p. 99.
- ¹⁸ Frank, *Einführung*, p. 310.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 289. "Die Zeit trennt nicht nur, sie bindet auch . . . obwohl nur relativ."
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289. "Es erfolgt . . . ein endlicher 'Erweis' des im Endlichen nie sich zeigenden, aber die ganze Reihe stiftenden und ihren Kohärenz verbürgenden Absoluten . . ."
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 311 [Italics are added.] "So schwebt die Zeit . . . in der Mitte zwischen dem actu Absoluten und der aufgelösten Endlichkeit unverbundener bzw. einande entgegengesetzter Einzelpositionenen. Durch ihre nicht endende Endlichkeit *mahnt* die Zeit ihren Ursprung im Absoluten *an*, durch ihre Partikularität/Relativität bequemt sie sich den Bedingungen der Endlichkeit."
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 377. "Der Blaubart selbst . . . gleitet unentwegt vom Dämonsichen ins Dümmlische, ohne daß wir sicher anzugeben vermöchten, in welcher der beiden Pole wir das 'Eigentliche,' . . . seiner Seele festmachen sollen."
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-8. Die Auflösung der Characterpsychologie ist nun freilich kein Versehen, sondern Ausdruck einer Einsicht in die Freiheit der Menschenseele, die . . . nicht eine Eigenschaft ist, die der Mensch hätte, sondern die sein Wesen selbst ist. . . . In der Flüchtigkeit jeder Charakterbezeichnung und Motivation spricht kaum hörbar die Einsicht mit, daß jeder auch anders sein und anders handeln könnte. Durch diese implizierte Relativierung der Endgültigkeit und Eindeutigkeit jedes Wortes, jeder Geste, jeder Kausalverknüpfung entsteht jene Tiecks Sprache eigene Heiterkeit, jener 'Äthergeist', der dem Dichter die größte Freiheit über seinem Stoff sichert. [The dissolving of a character's state of mind is certainly no oversight; rather, it is the expression of an insight into the freedom of the human soul, which is not a property the human has, but which is rather its very essence . . . In the brevity of each character profile and motivation is intimated the barely audible insight that each [character] could have been and [could have] behaved differently. Through this implied relativising of finality and definition of each word, gesture, and causal relation, there arises that signature merriness of Tieck's language, that 'Ether-spirit,' which safeguards for the poet the greatest freedom over his material.]
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290. "Das Absolute durchwaltet kontinuieritäts-stiftend die ganze Riehe, und insofern beweist die Reihe . . . das synthetische Wirken des Absoluten durch dessen nachweisbare Manifestation in relativen (partikulären) Synthesen."
- ²⁶ "Nur die unausdeutbare Sinnfülle des Kunstwerks kann positiv zeigen, was sich nicht definitiv in Wissen auflösen läßt. So wird das Kunstwerk zur einzig möglichen Darstellung des Undarstellbaren." [Only the uninterpretable meaning of the artwork can positively show that which does not allow itself to be resolved into

definitive knowledge. And so the artwork becomes the only possible presentation of the unrepresentable] Frank, "Intellektuale Anschauung," p. 125.

- ²⁷ It is noteworthy that poetry itself ends up superseded by the medium of music that exceeds even poetry's velocity. "Sie [die Musik] ist die wahre Heimat der Ironie; denn als die im eminenten Sinne zeitliche Künste führt sie uns die Furie des Verschwindens alles Gesagten als solches vor Augen." [It (music) is the true homeland of irony; for as the art, which is in an eminent sense temporal, brings before us the furious disappearance of everything expressed right before our eyes], (Frank, *Einführung*, p. 369). One might, then, form a mental picture of the subject as an unextended point surrounded by three concentric circles, where the possibility for movement, for free play, or the presentation of freedom increases as one moves outward from the centre: philosophy, poetry, music. It resembles a Ptolemaic universe wherein the Prime Mover issues mobilising fiat from the centre of the circle, the subject. In other words, the true homeland of irony, or time or, the true homeland in which the 'free' subject can observe in its freest form the initiatives it sends into the nearly immaterial, that is, nearly perfect medium of pure sound.
- ²⁸ Frank, *What is Neostructuralism*, p. 41.
- ²⁹ "This entire movement [Romanticism] sets out to be an overcoming . . . of Kant. It clearly presupposes . . . a conversion of the Kantian subject . . . into the ideal of a subject absolutely free and thereby conscious of itself." Because the Romantics respect Kant's proscription against the intellectual intuition, this 'overcoming' must achieve a substantial/intuitable presentation. This will take place in art. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 33.
- ³⁰ As Rodolphe Gasché has pointed out, for the Romantics' presentation of the idea (also called the absolute, or the totality), the ideality and absoluteness of the whole, are thinkable only in terms of an individuality that is, as sensible and hence intrinsically plural unity. And what is singular and at the same time plural? The numerically singular presentation that, in the event, appears in a single "eruption, event, surgissement . . ." Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 29. That is, in the form of the fragment.
- ³¹ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy explain, "[W]ithin the romantic work, there is interruption and dissemination of the romantic work, and this in fact is not readable in the work itself. . . . [r]ather, according to [a] term of Blanchot, it is readable in the unworking [*désœuvrement*], never named, still less thought, that insinuates itself through the interstices of the romantic work" p. 57. In *The Literary Absolute* itself, the authors say little enough about what they mean by the term they borrow from Blanchot (*désœuvrement*); the authors' silence has allowed a good deal

of confusion to surround this book ever since its publication in 1978. A gloss on what they mean by the term comes much later; for example in a later text, Nancy makes clear that *désœuvrement* is a synonym for the new freedom. “[F]reedom . . .” he writes, “being its own essence, that is, withdrawing from every essence, presence, substance, causality, production, and work, or being nothing other than (to use Blanchot’s term) the workless inoperation [*désœuvrement*], of existing.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993, p. 119.

³² Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 183.

³³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, pp. 86-87.

³⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 29.

³⁵ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, pp. 57-58.

³⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write, “The romantic ‘project,’ or in other words that brief, intense, and brilliant moment of writing (not quite two years and hundreds of pages) that by itself opens an entire era . . .” Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 7.

³⁷ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p. 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁹ “Am Quell der Freiheit sitzen wir und späh’n; er ist der große Zauberspiegel, in dem rein und klar die ganze Schöpfung sich enthüllt, in ihm baden die zarten Geister und Abbilder aller Naturen, und alle Kammern sehn wir aufgeschlossen. Was brauchen wir die trübe Welt der sichtbaren Dinge mühsam durchwandern? Die reinere Welt liegt ja in uns, in diesem Quell. Hier offenbart sich der wahre Sinn des großen, bunten, verwirrten Schauspiels.” Novalis, *Gedichte: Die Lehrlinge zu Säis*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1984, p. 74.

⁴⁰ “In den begeisternden Gefühlen unserer Freiheit laßt uns leben und sterben, hier quillt der Strom, der sie einst überschwemmen und zähmen wird, und in ihm laßt uns baden und mit neuem Mut zu Heldentaten uns erfrischen. Bis hierher reicht die Wut des Ungeheuers nicht, ein Tropfen Freiheit ist genug, sie auf immer zu lähmen und ihren Verheerungen Maß und Ziel zu setzen.” Novalis, *Gedichte*, p. 84.

⁴¹ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 16.

⁴² “Höchst merkwürdig ist es, daß der Mensch erst in diesem Spiele seine Eigentümlichkeit, seine spezifische Freiheit recht gewahr wird, und daß es ihm vorkommt, als erwache er aus einem tiefen Schläfe, als sei er nun erst in der Welt zu Hause, und verbreite jetzt erst das Licht des Tages sich über seine innere Welt.” Novalis, *Gedichte*, pp. 83-4.

⁴³ “Er taucht seine Hand in das Becken und benetzt seine Lippen. Es war, als durch-

dränge ihn ein geistiger Hauch, und er fühlte sich innigste gestärkt und erfrischt. Ein unwiderstehliches Verlangen ergriff ihn sich zu baden, er entkleidete sich und stieg in das Becken. Es dünkte ihn, als umflösse ihn eine Wolke des Abendrots; eine himmlische Empfindung überströmte sein Inneres; mit inniger Wollust strebte unzählbare Gedanken in ihm sich zu vermischen; neue, nie gesehene Bilder entstanden, die ineinanderflossen und zu sichtbaren Wesen um ihn wurden, und jede Welle des lieblichen Elements schmiegte sich wie ein zarter Busen an ihn. Die Flut schien eine Auflösung reizender Mädchen, die an dem Jünglinge sich augenblicklich verkörperten.“, Novalis, *Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, eds. Paul Kluckhahn and Richard Samuel, vol. 1, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1988, pp. 196-7. English trans. Kristin Pfefferkorn, *Novalis: A Romantic's Theory of Language and Poetry*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1988, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Pfefferkorn, *Novalis*, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Critchley and Dews, *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Gerald L. Bruns writes, “Poetry is responsive to whatever it hears; philosophy is assertive of whatever is the case. Poetry is self-reflexive language, language in excess of its signifying function—material, figurative, nomadic language; philosophy is propositional form, a syntax without a vocabulary, a transparent looking glass, a system of concepts. Poetry is spontaneous, open-ended, unrestrained by the law of non-contradiction; philosophy is rule-governed, self-contained, and just. The one is singular, contingent, refractory to categories; the other aspires only to what is necessary and universal. Poetry is porous, exposed, always captivated by what is otherwise; philosophy is disengaged and monodic, always careful to determine what counts as itself.” Gerald L. Bruns, *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy: Language, Literature, and Ethical Theory*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1999, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 5.

Andrew Bowie

Schleiermacher and Post-Metaphysical Thinking¹

ABSTRACT

Schleiermacher rarely features in the now widespread discussion of the relevance of the German Idealist and Romantic traditions for contemporary philosophy because he has mainly been regarded as a theologian and theorist of textual interpretation. This essay shows that his most important philosophical work, the *Dialectic*, involves many ideas concerning truth and language which are generally regarded as belonging to what Habermas terms 'post-metaphysical thinking'. Schleiermacher's views of truth and language are contrasted with those of Habermas and Rorty, and are seen as being of more than merely historical interest. His reflections on self-consciousness are shown to raise important questions for contemporary accounts of the relationship of the subject to language.

KEYWORDS: truth, language, post-metaphysical thinking, self-consciousness, aesthetics, music

When and why does the work of a philosopher from the past who has largely been forgotten within the wider philosophical community come to be seen as a resource for contemporary discussion? In the case of Plato or Kant such questions seem out of place, so much has their work been a perennial focus of philosophical attention in the modern

period.² The very degree of controversy generated by the inclusion in or exclusion from mainstream debate of many other philosophers is, though, as the case of Hegel can suggest, an important index of the state of contemporary philosophy. Over the last twenty years or so Hegel has finally seen off the attacks by Russell and others and forced his way even onto the agenda of philosophers like John McDowell, who, in common with most analytical philosophers, was apparently still ignoring him not that many years ago.³ One reason for the recent resurgence of interest in Hegel and the concomitant increased attention to Kant is very simple: the empiricist assumptions that underpinned much of the analytical tradition are no longer seen as credible in some of the most influential philosophical circles. In this connection it is no coincidence that a much more recent philosopher, Wilfrid Sellars, who for a time had ceased to be a major focus of discussion but whose reputation is now growing by the day, relied for many of his key ideas on reinterpretations of Kantian and Hegelian arguments. He did so most notably in order to attack what he termed the 'myth of the given', the idea that sense data are an immediate, non-inferential foundation of certainty which are the ultimate court of appeal in epistemological matters. Now the fact is that this is an idea that Schleiermacher probably attacked more convincingly than either Kant or Hegel. However, despite his prescience in this vital question, nobody could seriously maintain that Schleiermacher has attained a similar status to the Hegel who is now having such an effect on the Anglo-American philosophical landscape. There are, though, good reasons why some of the more interesting parts of Schleiermacher's philosophy have come to seem remarkably contemporary in ways which can actually be used to challenge the perhaps too exclusive concentration upon Hegel. Demonstrating this requires rather a lot of scene-setting, but will, I hope, help to bring Schleiermacher into the philosophical present.⁴

The renewed interest in Sellars is part of the wider shift of intellectual climate in contemporary philosophy which has led to the revaluation of certain figures from the classical German tradition who also reject the myth of the given. Schleiermacher's particular significance within this tradition can initially be suggested by the fact that the following verdict by Karl Leonhard Reinhold in 1812 on the classical period of German philosophy evidently does not apply to him, though it largely does to Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel: "In regard to these discussions about the possibility of philosophy as science, which

have distinguished this period in the history of philosophy, it is an undeniable, though hardly noted fact . . . that the relation of thinking to speaking and the character of linguistic usage in philosophizing in no way came under scrutiny and to formulation."⁵ Establishing the precise nature of Schleiermacher's place within the wider German Idealist-influenced shift in contemporary philosophy does, however, pose some informative hermeneutic problems, which can be illustrated by the following.

At a recent conference Peter Strawson, the primary focus of much of the analytical debate about Kant, apparently remarked that he has never actually read the *Critique of Judgement*; in another context, of course, he referred to the philosopher he would 'call Leibniz', in order to avoid questions about whether the arguments he is interested in are really those of Leibniz at all. Two opposed dilemmas are highlighted by Strawson's approach, which are germane to what I have to say. On the one hand, the desire to do hermeneutic justice to a thinker on the part of those rightly worried by Strawson's approach can lead to what one might term 'historicist irrelevance'. This results from the claim that a thinker's ideas can only be properly understood in terms of the historical contexts to which they are a response. The problem is that these contexts inherently require so much research that it becomes hard to know at what point one would be able to claim to make the move from establishing contexts to 'doing philosophy', especially given that the relevant contexts are potentially inexhaustible. (Schleiermacher's own pragmatic conviction, both in his dialectic and in his hermeneutics, that one has no choice but to 'begin in the middle' is, of course, precisely a response to this kind of dilemma.) On the other hand, 'Strawson's Kant' drains the thought of Kant of so much of its significance for the contexts to which Kant was responding that the point of using Kant's texts, rather than just stating the arguments in question independently of their putative source, tends to be lost. These unattractive alternatives point to a crucial issue for the present investigation. Contextualism is obviously vital to the interpretation of a thinker, but if it is to be philosophically significant the interpretation has to transcend immediate context in some way. At the same time, emphatic claims to transcend context of the kind characteristic, for example, of contemporary scientism are part of what is put in question by the recent developments in Anglo-American philosophy that have returned us to issues raised by the German Idealist and Romantic traditions.

An overly historicist hermeneutic approach does, though, involve a further informative difficulty. How is one even to begin to understand a thinker without at the same time having some conception of how what the thinker says could be true, which is one of the more usable criteria for talking about meaning in the analytical tradition?⁶ The hermeneutic claim against such assimilation of thinkers from the past to one's own conceptions is often that it is precisely by getting beyond one's limited historico-philosophical horizon that one can make new discoveries. However, there are important limits on the extent to which one can claim to be able to do this, which are already highlighted by Schleiermacher and which have been echoed in Donald Davidson's insistence that even the most extreme disagreements, of the kind to be found between philosophical views from radically differing contexts, rely on some basis in agreement if they are to count as disagreements at all, rather than as total non-communication. Without the inextricable interplay of identity and difference between the past and the present, between one's own context and the contexts of the other, it is hard to know how one could even begin to be aware of the nature of one's *own* interpretative horizons, let alone those of the other.⁷ This leads us to the main context in which I wish to place Schleiermacher.

What I have to say was occasioned by the realisations (1) that aspects of Schleiermacher's *Dialectic* bear striking similarities to some of the recent contentions of Jürgen Habermas about post-metaphysical thinking; (2) that these similarities make clearer what Schleiermacher's contribution was to the Romantic critique of Idealism; and (3) that the relations between the conceptions of Schleiermacher and Habermas take one right to the heart of crucial divisions in contemporary philosophy. The very facts that Schleiermacher raised what are now seen as major issues in a similar manner to one of the most influential philosophers writing today, and that his ideas did not become part of mainstream philosophical debate already suggest an important way of looking at the history of philosophy. Why did it take until now for many of these ideas to gain wider currency, given that they have been available for 190 years or so? What prevented these ideas being a really major influence on the course of modern philosophy, despite their undoubted relevance to that philosophy? Was it just the contingencies of textual reception?

What, then, does it mean to be a 'post-metaphysical' thinker, and why and how does Schleiermacher relate to the notion? The historical link of Schleiermacher to what Habermas intends with the term 'post-metaphysical

thinking' can already dispel some contextualist objections. Habermas suspects that the philosophical situation from which we begin today is "not essentially different from that of the first generation of Hegel's pupils."⁸ The well-established influence of Schleiermacher on Feuerbach and other Young Hegelians therefore already establishes an initial connection, on the basis of a shared suspicion of Hegel's totalising systematisation of philosophy and of an ambiguous, but essentially critical relationship to philosophical idealism. Habermas characterises what he means by modern metaphysics as: "the modification of identity thinking, the doctrine of ideas, and a strong conception of theory, in terms of the philosophy of consciousness."⁹ Post-metaphysical thinking arises, he claims, when three dominant approaches in modern philosophy that rely on this modification become questionable: (1) The versions of identity thinking present in some of German Idealism are undermined by the empirical methods of the natural sciences, which introduce an inescapable contingency into what philosophy can say there may be in nature, thus invalidating *a priori* systems based on founding concepts; (2) the doctrine of ideas in the form of transcendental philosophy is subverted both by the realisation of the historical relativity of foundational philosophical concepts and by suspicion, generated by new insights into the role of language in the constitution of knowledge, of the subject-object paradigm of philosophy; (3) the priority of theoretical contemplation is put in question by the realisation that successful theories are predominantly generated and validated via interaction with the material world in practical contexts. As we shall see, Schleiermacher's thought, while apparently adopting some of the assumptions of 'metaphysics' in the sense suggested by Habermas, contains versions of all three of the main criticisms that lead to the agenda of post-metaphysical thinking. At the same time Schleiermacher can be read as offering a significant alternative to some of the current consensus over what can be consigned to the metaphysical past. My aim is, then, to read Schleiermacher 'forwards', in terms of his possible philosophical future, rather than 'backwards' in terms of where he may have been coming from. The main reason for this is simple: one of the sources of the philosophical neglect of Schleiermacher is precisely the concern in most of the secondary literature to consider him too exclusively in terms of his historical contexts.

For Habermas it is, above all, the link between language and action that characterises post-metaphysical thinking. This link takes philosophy away from

a conception determined by the Cartesian question of how the subject can reliably represent a world of pre-existing objects to itself and others towards a conception in which agreement within a linguistic community acting in the world becomes the criterion of objectivity. Schleiermacher, of course, already helps inaugurate such a conception: “the art of finding principles of knowledge can be none other than our art of carrying on conversation,” the “art” which is the subject of the *Dialectic*.¹⁰ The consequence of the move away from the Cartesian questions for Habermas is that the idea of any higher court of appeal is renounced and a thoroughgoing fallibilism is accepted as inevitable. Legitimation of all kinds, from the cognitive to the aesthetic, becomes normatively based, and the demands for the possibility of uncoerced consensus and for a readiness to acknowledge the ‘forceless force of the better argument’ become paramount. Related views have, of course, been put forward by Robert Brandom, Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, and others in the pragmatist tradition. However—and this strand of my argument provides a route into a crucial contemporary issue which is already a major problem for Schleiermacher—Habermas has recently become worried that this approach to truth does not overcome some perennial dilemmas quite as emphatically as he might initially have hoped. The problem Habermas sees derives from the fact that in the pragmatist version of the linguistic turn the correspondence theory of truth is generally rejected in favour of consensus and coherence theories, or, in Rorty’s case, no substantive theory of truth at all.

The essential objection to correspondence theories is, Habermas argues, that “we would ‘have to step out of language’ with language itself . . . Obviously we cannot compare the linguistic expression with a piece of uninterpreted or ‘naked’ reality.”¹¹ It is important to realise, though, that objections to correspondence theories need not be associated exclusively with the analytical linguistic turn. They are already part of the philosophy of the early German Romantics. Friedrich Schlegel claimed, for example, that in a correspondence theory “the object would, as such, have to be compared with the representation; but that is not at all possible, because one only ever has a representation of the object, and thus can only ever compare one representation with another”¹²—Schlegel is, at the same time, also aware that this comparison relies on language. Even Kant, who expressly claims to be advancing a correspondence theory at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, elsewhere makes the same sort of objection to it as Schlegel: “how are we to compare [the object]

with [our representations]?"; "an object outside us is transcendent, i.e. is completely unknown to us and is unusable as a criterion of truth"; elsewhere he asserts: "My judgement is supposed to correspond to the object. Now I can only compare the object with knowledge by knowing it."¹³ Knowing something, for Kant, depends upon my representation being classified under the correct cognitive rule, which is the condition of possibility of it being a representation of an object at all. Coherence of beliefs on the basis of the shared necessary rules of the understanding and of reason therefore becomes the essential criterion of truth, not correspondence to transcendent objects that are only ever given to us in the irreducibly particular form of sensuous intuition.

Schleiermacher himself also often invokes correspondence as the criterion of truth, but the important point in the present context is that he nearly always does so in a way that makes it clear that it does no real philosophical work. Correspondence is, he insists, only "the postulate of completed knowledge," because "our thought never completely corresponds to the object."¹⁴ He cannot, then, be said to conceive of knowledge in terms of the representation of pre-given objects, because knowledge relies on language. His doctrine of the schema, which forms the core of his conception of language, shows why:

at different times the same organic affection [this is Schleiermacher's term for the means by which the world is 'given to us' in intuition] leads to completely different concepts. The perception of an emerald will at one time be for me a schema of a certain green, then of a certain crystallisation, finally of a certain stone . . . For anything which is perceived is never completely resolved into its concept, and determining this relativity, without which the concept would not be able to result at all, depends upon intellectual activity, without which even perception could not be limited.¹⁵

Consequently: "The absolute identity of schematism in knowledge only exists as the demand/claim (*Anspruch*) of individuals, but nothing that completely corresponds to it can be shown."¹⁶ There cannot be one essential concept of a thing which could "grasp the whole content of the organic affection."¹⁷ This is because our very ability to articulate what there is depends upon *limitations* of what would otherwise be either an undifferentiated One or a mere chaos of sensations. It is therefore only ever possible to articulate what things are via the existing resources of a particular natural language, a language which builds an inherent relativity into knowledge: "For language is not

completely subordinated to construction and remains attached to nature.”¹⁸ There is, then, no ‘given’ that can be invoked as the ultimate ground of the truth of our utterances, and there is no privileged ‘philosophical language’ either. Schleiermacher also argues for the same reasons that the strict Kantian division between the subject’s *a priori*, spontaneous forms of knowledge and the receptive material of intuition cannot be sustained. In all these arguments Schleiermacher prefigures the essential claim, summed up in Habermas’ assertion that: “a linguistically unfiltered access to reality is impossible.”¹⁹ The interpretations of this claim in inferentialist semantics are what has led to a new connection of analytical philosophy to the hermeneutic tradition. Schleiermacher is led by his arguments about language, as Habermas will be, towards a consensus theory: “knowledge in its temporal development is the agreement of all in thinking,” not the true representation of objects.²⁰

Schleiermacher’s pre-empting of much contemporary debate is further evident in his claims that “before mankind acquires language it also does not have thought,”²¹ and that “What we call thought as a whole is an activity . . . such that everyone can act by designating in the same way.”²² His arguments concerning language and thought explore the problems in Kant’s separation of intellect and intuition in a way that was first suggested by Hamann, but which Schleiermacher develops in a manner more characteristic of philosophy today than of his antecedents: “Even reason only becomes an object for us via the organism [i.e. in receptivity], namely via language.”²³ As Habermas puts it in his account of the characteristics of post-metaphysical thinking, “world-constituting capacities are transferred from transcendental subjectivity to grammatical structures,” structures which are historically contingent and acquired in the life world.²⁴ Reliance on grammatical structures itself tends to lead in the direction of consensus theories of truth, which depend on what appears to Habermas to be inherent in the very fact of communication itself, the ‘telos of agreement/understanding’.

However—and this is the specific point which Habermas, like Putnam, has recently come to stress—wholesale abandonment of the correspondence theory in favour of a basis in consensus also entails the surrender of some widely held intuitions. This again leads to issues that concerned Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher suggests why when he claims that “there is error and truth in language as well, even incorrect thought can become common to all.”²⁵

The basic worry here lies in what Habermas terms the “culturalist assimilation of being-true to mere taking-as-true,”²⁶ which is at odds with the fact that “we connect an unconditional claim which points beyond all available evidence with the truth of assertions.”²⁷ The difficulty is that, even as this unconditional claim is made, our preparedness to believe something actually depends upon the extent to which we think it can be successfully justified. In the absence of a specifiable relation of correspondence between assertion and referent, however, these justifications are inherently fallible, and thus no ultimate guarantee of the truth of an assertion at all.

The decisive point about this issue in relation to Schleiermacher can be highlighted by contrasting Habermas’ and Rorty’s versions of pragmatism, and this takes us to the heart of a crucial divide in contemporary philosophy. Habermas argues that the “presupposition of a world which is objective and independent of our descriptions” is required if the difference between opinion and unconditional truth is to be sustained in the praxis of communication.²⁸ It is important to note here, however, in relation to Habermas’ idea of the “realist intuition” presupposed in all truth-oriented inquiry, that “being objective” and “being independent of our descriptions” need not mean the same thing. The former can mean “intelligibly structured in a way we actually get in touch with when what we say is true,”²⁹ but the latter can just mean “brutely ‘there’, ‘in itself’, whether or not it makes any sense to say that our beliefs have an essential truth-determinate relationship to it or not.” Habermas’ ambiguous presupposition echoes Schleiermacher’s claim that “In the basic presupposition of conflicting thought lies the assumption of a being outside us which is common to all.”³⁰ Schleiermacher therefore maintains that “Disagreement of any kind presupposes the acknowledgement of the sameness of an object, as well as the necessity of the relationship of thought to being . . . For if we take away this relationship of thought to being there is no disagreement, rather, as long as thought only remains purely within itself, there is only difference (*Verschiedenheit*).”³¹ The question is just how this identity is to be conceived if one renounces a correspondence theory. The being presupposed by both Schleiermacher and Habermas transcends anything determinate that can be said about it.

Rorty, who offers the most challenging alternative here, claims that “all I can mean by ‘transcendent’ is getting beyond our present practices by a gesture

in the direction of our possibly different future practices,"³² so that the fallibilist "cautionary" use of "true" is just a "gesture towards future generations,"³³ rather than something which relies on the assumption that there is an ultimate "objective" "fact of the matter." For Habermas, in contrast, "It is the goal of justifications to find out a truth which stretches beyond all justifications."³⁴ This suggests that there must be some other way of arriving at truth beyond justification, but the problem is that Habermas does not specify what it is. Rorty, on the other hand, thinks that even though "any discursive practice will necessarily have an 'is-seems' distinction,"³⁵ "the *only* point in contrasting the true with the merely justified is to contrast a possible future with the actual present."³⁶ In short, Habermas retains truth, in a Kantian manner, as a regulative idea, whereas Rorty thinks this means truth would be "an ever-retreating goal, one that fades forever and forever when we move." This is, he argues, "not what common sense would call a goal. For it is neither something we might realise we had reached, nor something to which we might get closer."³⁷ Rorty does, though, claim that the notion of a goal of inquiry or a moral ideal which is supposed to be endlessly approached but never attained is a *focus imaginarius*, albeit one which "is none the worse for being an invention rather than (as Kant thought it) a built in feature of the human mind."³⁸ As we have seen, Schleiermacher is probably closer to Habermas than to Rorty in the question at issue here, but his position involves some important complexities.

Like Schelling, who is a major influence on the *Dialectic*, Schleiermacher combines an adherence to many of the conceptual moves and the rhetoric of German Idealism with arguments that begin to undermine some of the emphatic philosophical claims of Idealism.³⁹ Take this characteristic formulation from the notes of between 1811 and 1818, concerning the relation between thought and being: "Opposition of the universal and the particular. The latter that which cannot be purely represented in thought, the former that which cannot be purely given in being."⁴⁰ The absolute identity of being and knowledge is therefore "nowhere given to us," so we are faced with an endless "approximation" to it that involves being inherently located between two inaccessible extremes.⁴¹ This position was also suggested in Schleiermacher's rejection of Kant's strict distinction between the spontaneous (= universal) and the receptive (= particular). Schleiermacher's argument, as we saw, is that neither of these poles can ever be said to be present

in their pure form because even *a priori* forms of thought rely for their articulation on the learning of a natural language that has to be instantiated in the always particular material of receptivity, and, at the same time, the very *notion* of that material as inherently particular is itself an abstraction which requires the activity of thought.

Schleiermacher, then, like Davidson and Rorty, rejects the scheme-content distinction, the distinction “between what language contributes to the object and what the world contributes.”⁴² Differing attempts to reconcile subject-object, language-world oppositions like this are the basis of major philosophical differences within German Idealism, and one paradigmatic alternative keeps recurring. Should the identity of being and knowledge be sent to the end of philosophy as a Kantian regulative idea, in the manner of Habermas’ claims about the truth that ‘stretches beyond all justifications’, or must it be placed at the beginning of philosophy as the inaccessible ground of knowledge? As Schleiermacher puts it, suggesting how he links both these options together: “Just as certainly as we cannot give up the [future, regulative] idea of knowledge, we must presuppose this primal being in which the opposition between concept and object is removed, but without being able to carry out any real thinking in relation to it.”⁴³ The two alternatives are classically ‘metaphysical’, but the fact is that Schleiermacher does not see them as playing a role in our actual thinking about the world in which we act and communicate.

The question now is whether both these extreme alternatives do not in fact lead to scepticism, because the chain of determination which would make thought and being identical could only be definitive if the totality were fully determined, which is precisely what can never happen, either because an endless task cannot, by definition, be completed, or because the ‘original separation’, which makes knowledge possible at all by differentiating a primal undifferentiated unity, cannot in principle be overcome once the separation has taken place. A version of the disagreement between Habermas and Rorty is evidently lurking again at this point.

This is also the territory upon which some of the contemporary revival of Hegelianism is carried out. Hegelians generally use the problems associated with the endless deferral of final certainty, the ‘infinite task’, to argue for Hegel’s dissolution of the ground into the dialectic, which comes to an end

when the totality of the negative moments negates itself in the—positive—absolute idea. The *realisation* that each moment of cognition is inherently a failure itself ultimately becomes the successful philosophical demonstration that knowledge can *only* develop as a result of the refutation of previous knowledge. The problem of the initial ground of philosophy is obviated by the fact that each failed, relative attempt to reach such a ground in intersubjective contexts propels one forward to the next way in which the world can be articulated, and so on. In consequence, philosophy's understanding that there can be nothing more to the mind-world relation than what is seen in the negation of the negation is the only finally positive, absolute insight, which results from exhaustively articulating the structures of all finite insights and integrating them into a dynamic system of categories.

However 'non-metaphysical' one's reading of Hegel, the choice between the Kantian and Romantic, and the Hegelian options comes down to whether even the deflationary reading of Hegel must entail the dissolution of being into thought which follows from the idea that there can be nothing outside what emerges from thought's attempts to determine being. This can be read traditionally in terms of *Geist* as the self-articulating truth of being, or, as Terry Pinkard reads it, for example, in terms of the principles of intersubjective validation in a community beyond which there can be no further court of appeal—a position which is, of course, only one step, albeit a decisive one, from that of Rorty outlined above. Habermas' worry about consensus theories here comes into play, and he expressly invokes it against contemporary deflationary Hegelianism, on the grounds that "What is rationally acceptable according to our conception is not necessarily the same as what is objectively true."⁴⁴ Hegel tries, Habermas asserts, to dissolve the latter into the former by absolutising the former, thus making what is really objective spirit into absolute spirit. What is objectively true for Habermas is, though, as we saw, only a regulative idea, and cannot be equated with justified belief, because all justification is inherently fallible. Here the similarity to Schleiermacher is very apparent. Schleiermacher asserts, against idealism, that "In all thought something is posited which is outside thought. One thinks *something* does not only mean thought is determined but also that it relates to something posited outside itself."⁴⁵ He consequently argues that "before the completion of real knowledge absolute knowledge is given only in a divided way and . . . it only really exists in the inexpressible thought of the unity of divided knowl-

edge," because progress in knowledge can only ever come about by criticism of what is taken as true.⁴⁶ In consequence, unlike in Hegel: "The idea of absolute being as the identity of concept and object is therefore not knowledge."⁴⁷ Given that this identity is only a regulative idea, though, one is back with the endless task, and the question is once again whether this entails a scepticism of the kind that Hegel's philosophical method was directed towards overcoming.

Both Schleiermacher and Habermas, like Rorty, regard the primacy of the practical as the crucial bulwark against scepticism. Schleiermacher talks of the "harmonisation of our willing with being" that is evident in the fact that "external being is receptive to our reason and also takes on the ideal imprint of our will."⁴⁸ He claims that "a real willing is always the ground of conditioned thought which relates to an action; and here the real value of thinking is its agreement with what is thought. I do not wish to think the whole object, but only that aspect of the object which relates to my action."⁴⁹ Habermas puts the same point as follows: "As actors . . . we are already in contact with things about which we can make assertions."⁵⁰ Clearly, when we act, we do not function in terms of what is entailed by such ideas as correspondence or correct representation. We can be brought towards what we employ such notions for when our activity fails to impact on the world in the way we intend—in Heidegger's terms, when the *Zuhanden* becomes *Vorhanden*—but this is necessarily secondary to the specific contacts we have with things in unreflective action. Whereas the consequence of this for Habermas is that communicative action becomes the new focus of philosophy, which takes us away from the aporias of subject/object metaphysics, Schleiermacher seems often to remain within this metaphysical paradigm. Things are, though, again not quite so simple. One of the difficulties involved in understanding Schleiermacher's position (and, one suspects, that Schleiermacher himself had in establishing that position) lies in deciding what the consequences really are of his simultaneous adoption of the regulative idea of a final identity of thought and being, the presupposition of their primal identity, and the fact that he is quite explicit that these two identities are conceptually inaccessible to us. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the later work he moves away from some of his more Idealist formulations of the task of dialectic towards an ever-greater emphasis on the idea that all dialectic can do is offer methods for overcoming disagreement.

This is particularly apparent in two late passages, one from 1833, the other from 1831. In the first passage Schleiermacher expressly says farewell to certain well-known versions of German Idealism, in favour of the idea that in actual thinking we must always ‘begin in the middle’:

we renounce the procedure of all those who, by putting up a series of core propositions (*ein Inbegriff von Sätzen*) that are supposed to contain the essence of knowledge in such a way that everything further can be developed out of them, whether they call it *Wissenschaftslehre*, or logic, or metaphysics, or philosophy of nature, or whatever, place a so-called basic proposition at the apex as the proposition with which knowledge must necessarily begin and which must itself be absolutely accepted without already having been contained in what has previously been thought or being able to be developed from it.⁵¹

Habermas precisely echoes Schleiermacher on this latter point: “We cannot confront our sentences directly with a reality which is not itself already linguistically impregnated; for this reason no class of fundamental propositions can be identified which legitimate themselves ‘of their own accord’ and thus can serve as the beginning or end of a linear chain of legitimation.”⁵² In the second passage Schleiermacher suggests that a “doctrine of the art” of “coming to an understanding with each other”—the term he uses is “*Sichverständigen*,” which is Habermas’ term in this context—that would make language identical for all, does not exist. He therefore claims that the “completion” of *episteme* is “coming to an understanding,” which is “an art *techné*.” As such, it is “an activity” and both *episteme* and *techné* “are the same . . . both expressions are only specific ways in which what is designated by *thinking* occurs in reality in a temporal manner.”⁵³ Epistemology is, then, dissolved into communicative action.

If this sounds too hasty an assimilation of Schleiermacher to Habermas’ conception, consider Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic claims about the relation of philosophy to language, which echo Habermas’ insistence that theory is grounded in the practically generated consensuses of the life-world:

Language never begins to form itself through science, but via general communication/exchange (*Verkehr*); science [*Wissenschaft*, which includes ‘philosophy’] comes to this only later, and only brings an expansion, not a new

creation, in language. As science often takes the direction of beginning from the beginning, it must choose new expressions for new thoughts. Forming new root words would be of no help because these would in turn have to be explained by already existing ones.⁵⁴

Consequently, “agreement (*Verständigung*) about the universal language is itself subordinated to individual languages.”⁵⁵ Even formulating the Cartesian sceptical problem relies upon the idea that everyday language is already in contact with the world in a way that we cannot step outside. This means the sceptical problem, if it *is* a problem, is in fact a linguistic one. The real question, as Schleiermacher sees it, occurs at the level of disagreement between speakers, not at the level of whether thought is ‘in touch with reality’. The very notion of such being in touch always presupposes the separation of thought and reality and thus prejudices the issue in an aporetic direction.

However, if all we can achieve is consensus by dissolving disagreement, the difficulty is then that: “the rules for resolving differences must be given before that endpoint [of the dissolution of all differences], and, on the other hand, because of the connectedness of all thought, there is no complete certainty about the rules if the endpoint is not reached.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, the need for an “absolute beginning point” is thwarted by the fact that “languages are irrational in relation to each other.”⁵⁷ The point is, then, as Schleiermacher suggests most clearly in the hermeneutics, that there *are* no absolute epistemic or linguistic foundations. How would we even be able to learn about them if we did not already understand the language we use to *arrive* at the formulation of the philosophical problem of foundations?

Schleiermacher claims elsewhere against scepticism—and here he is again echoed by Habermas—that the “presupposition of the possibility of error in all knowledge, this knowledge that knowledge is neither complete, nor will ever be complete, does not damage the belief in the idea of knowledge, but just provokes criticism.”⁵⁸ This claim leads him to the fallibilist position he terms “critical scepticism,” which does not, as does “total scepticism,” accept that the “relation between thinking and being” is negated, given that throughout history “truth was often in the thinker without belief (*Überzeugung*), and belief without truth,”⁵⁹ and that “belief can be false and truth can be doubted.”⁶⁰ When it comes to explaining this truth he admits, though, that the notion of correspondence is of no help: “But as far as the expression knowledge

corresponds to being is concerned: one could replace it with many others, all with the same value; but what it means does not get any clearer thereby, for because it is what is prior (*das Ursprüngliche*) in the orientation towards knowledge, from which everything else develops, it cannot be explained.”⁶¹ In Rortyan terms the obvious inference with regard to the nature of knowledge is therefore that “there is nothing that can plausibly be described as a *goal* of inquiry, although the desire for further justification, of course, serves as a *motive* of inquiry.”⁶² Schleiermacher, in contrast, claims that “behind the difference of separate knowledge we must necessarily presuppose a universal identity, and by this we hold firm to the idea of the purity of knowledge, even if we cannot show an object in which it manifests itself.”⁶³ We cannot do so because: “No real concept can be constituted to the point of complete knowledge.”⁶⁴ Although the idea of a completed ‘real concept’ presupposes something like the notion of correspondence, the arguments we have seen so far make this just a regulative idea. Indeed, one might even suggest that a regulative idea is actually the ideal motive for inquiry, given that it derives from the essential experience of committed inquiry, namely that any position always needs further defence and criticism.

Despite the differences from Rorty, Schleiermacher already establishes some of the key ideas that also inform Rorty’s position, further suggesting how his ideas prefigure many contemporary philosophical divisions, even though there may be no direct path of influence. This is perhaps most notable in Schleiermacher’s pre-empting of the essential move in Quine’s critique of logical positivism, which results from the idea of the inherent incompleteness of any ‘real concept’:

The difference between analytical and synthetic judgements is a fluid one, of which we take no account. The same judgement (ice melts) can be an analytical one if the coming into being and disappearance via certain conditions of temperature are already taken up into the concept of ice, and a synthetic one, if they are not yet taken up. . . . This difference therefore just expresses a different state of the formation of concepts.⁶⁵

Despite the transcendent aims of Schleiermacher’s account, the fact that access to the absolute is inherently deferred means, as we have seen, that its effect on the actual practice of knowing can essentially be discounted. Schleiermacher’s position here will also be echoed by Rorty: “Only the absolute

as it never appears for itself in consciousness and the contentless idea of mere matter are free of all relativity. The subtractive procedure of excluding everything from the domain of knowledge that is tinged with relativity would permit no real knowledge at all."⁶⁶ We must therefore "be satisfied with arbitrary beginnings in all areas of knowledge," there being no logical rules which can dictate how knowledge progresses, and no knowledge of the world which is not relational.⁶⁷

In the light of what has been said so far it might seem rather surprising that Rorty himself admits that "'true' is an absolute term,"⁶⁸ claiming that "Davidson has helped us realize that *the very absoluteness of truth is a good reason for thinking 'true' indefinable and for thinking that no theory of the nature of truth is possible*. It is only the relative about which there is anything to say."⁶⁹ Hegel's objection to Reinhold, that his absolute is the 'night in which all cows are black', might seem to be appropriate here: in both Schleiermacher and Rorty there is nothing *philosophical* to say about the absolute, because anything one might say relativises what cannot be relative and thus says nothing determinate. This is in fact already a key idea in early Romantic philosophy. As Novalis puts it in 1796: "The essence of identity can only be established in a pseudo-proposition (*Scheinsatz*). We leave the identical in order to represent it."⁷⁰ As we saw, Habermas rejected the Hegelian account of the absolute here by claiming that "What is rationally acceptable according to our conception is not necessarily the same as what is objectively true." The vital question is therefore whether we can really make any sense of the presupposition of "a world which is objective and independent of our descriptions" without also coming up with a plausible account of truth, of the kind Rorty thinks we can—and must—do without. Crucially, Habermas himself sees this presupposition as a purely 'formal' aspect of the praxis of argumentation, without which it would make no sense to expect anyone to come to share an opinion as presumptively true.⁷¹ What, though, is the status of propositions about the objectively true world? It cannot be the same as the status of warranted but fallible assertions about things and events in the world, as Habermas' idea of 'truth which stretches beyond all justifications' made clear.

Rorty regards Habermas' presupposition as simply creating problems we can avoid. He cites Davidson, who claims the notion of the 'objective world' that is independent of what we think about it "derives from the idea of

correspondence, and this is an idea without content."⁷² As we have seen, Schleiermacher actually shares Davidson's and Rorty's assumption in a vital respect, because correspondence to this objective world is never actually present, its 'content' being what cannot be manifest, which is no *cognitive* content at all (cf. "The idea of absolute being as the identity of concept and object is . . . not knowledge"). As we just saw, even Habermas sees the 'objective world' only as a *formal* presupposition of truth-oriented discourse. This is because he rightly regards the metaphysical realist version of objectivity as leading straight to epistemological scepticism—if the 'objective world' were *really* totally independent of our thinking *nothing* could tell us, in thought, whether what we think and say *ever* corresponds to it. Schleiermacher actually shares the idea of a formal presupposition in a perhaps rather startling way, which tells us something important about the relationship between philosophy and theology in his thinking: "Except for the fact that the divinity is, as transcendent being, the principle of all being, and as transcendent idea is the formal principle of all knowledge, there is nothing to say about it in the realm of knowledge. Everything else is just bombast or the interference of the religious, which, because it does not belong here, must have damaging effects."⁷³ Elsewhere he says that "the unconditioned . . . the highest, absolute, divinity, nothingness . . . the same thing is designated by all these."⁷⁴ What is 'designated' is the inarticulable presupposition of what we *can* articulate, and it is this inarticulable presupposition which is also entailed by Habermas' arguments about the formally presupposed 'objective world'. The question here is how the move away from a conception focused on knowledge is made, given that attempts to say anything about the truth that 'stretches beyond all justifications' necessarily take one beyond the sphere of inferentially articulated knowledge.

Rorty tells a provocative, Heidegger-influenced story about this issue: "The ambition of transcendence, in the form it took in modern philosophy, gave us the distinction between the world and our conceptions of the world, between the content and the scheme we applied to that content, between the truly objective and the merely intersubjective."⁷⁵ Instead of talking of a world which has "intrinsic qualities unchangeable by our descriptions," and which therefore transcends "the human point of view,"⁷⁶ Rorty wants us to accept the contingency of all our views, not in a sceptical direction, but in the direction of Davidson's claims, both that "only beliefs can make belief true," and

that we should think of most of what we and others say as true.⁷⁷ Rorty sees philosophy as otherwise condemned to keep repeating the moves which lead from “epistemological scepticism, to transcendental idealism, absolute idealism, logical constructionism and phenomenology,” which is, of course, hardly an inaccurate portrait of what still goes on in large parts of Western philosophy today.⁷⁸ The key issue lies, therefore, in how we talk about transcendence. Habermas wishes, despite all his pragmatizing moves and his concomitant rejection of the reduction of language in much analytical philosophy to its representational function, to sustain a normative notion of transcendence which is presupposed in the enterprise of all those who earnestly seek truth. How exactly is Schleiermacher to be understood in this respect, and what does this tell us about his significance for contemporary philosophy?

Anyone acquainted with more traditional interpretations of Schleiermacher’s work may, I suspect, by now be feeling that they have so far been presented with a very strange creature indeed, who is just trying to pass himself off under the name of Schleiermacher. I have deliberately passed over some of the less defensible aspects of his arguments in favour of those which have stood the test of time, but I have tried to anchor my interpretation in a convincing internal reconstruction of the texts. A somewhat more familiar figure may, though, now emerge as we try to establish further how Schleiermacher deals with the question of transcendence. The kind of transcendence Rorty seeks to avoid, the idea of a world untainted by our perspective on it, is evidently not the concern of Schleiermacher’s most plausible arguments:

to the extent that all such oppositions, such as between cognition and representation or knowledge and opinion, between the common viewpoint and the higher viewpoint, between the speculative and the empirical, and whatever other way they might be expressed, are intended such that one side is supposed to designate the rest of thinking as a whole, whereas the other designates pure thought precisely as something completely separate from and completely opposed to the first which could not ever be developed out of it, we first of all dissociate ourselves from these oppositions because we . . . see no possibility of artistic [= where there are no rules for the application of the rules] dialogue between sides which each lie completely outside the language of the other side.⁷⁹

Furthermore, the intelligibility of the object of knowledge can, as in the Sellars-influenced post-Kantian tradition from which Rorty derives, never be the result of empirical input alone: “the concept as such is never contained in what is provided by the organic function . . . it is completely a matter of what I take out of the objects,” for the reasons suggested by the doctrine of schematism which is the basis of Schleiermacher’s linguistic turn.⁸⁰ In none of this is there the suggestion that our consciousness is somehow disconnected from the world in a ‘Cartesian’ manner, but what *is* inaccessible is the kind of demonstration, which Hegel claims to provide, that philosophy can articulate the identity of thought and being.

The question of transcendence in Schleiermacher’s philosophy is, though, also associated with two closely related terms whose meaning is anything but straightforward and which have always caused difficulties for those interpreting Schleiermacher: the “transcendent ground,” and “feeling” or “immediate self-consciousness.”⁸¹ Here things become very controversial and I do not by any means claim to be able to untangle all the difficulties involved. Schleiermacher maintains that “the transcendent ground of being cannot be something thought,” but he also maintains that “We carry the identity of thought and being in ourselves; we ourselves are being and thinking, thinking being and existing thinking.”⁸² In order to avoid idealism we have to move from this identity in ourselves to the “transcendent ground of all being.”⁸³ It is this connection which both causes interpretative problems and suggests a possible challenge to some widely shared contemporary assumptions.

For Schleiermacher our consciousness is located between the postulated, never-present poles of total receptive passivity and total spontaneous activity, between pure objectivity and pure subjectivity. As a result our actual existence consists in the continual movement between the effects the world has on us and the effects we have on the world, between ‘knowing’ and ‘willing’, neither of which ever lacks some—however minimal—aspect of the other. This conception actually comes close to Rorty, because it acknowledges both the constant causal impacts of the world upon us (in the ‘organic function’) and the fact that these impacts will be schematised in different ways in different languages and cultures, there being no way of knowing that nature can be cut at the joints by the differentiations of a language. Unlike Rorty, though, Schleiermacher thinks this movement requires some ground of iden-

tity if experience is to be intelligible at all and is not to disintegrate in the movement from knowing to willing and vice versa:

as thinkers we are only in the single act [of thought]; but as beings we are the unity of all single acts and moments. Progression is only the transition from one moment to the next. This therefore takes place through our being, the living unity of the succession of the acts of thought. The transcendent basis of thought, in which the principles of linkage are contained, is nothing but our own transcendent basis as thinking being.⁸⁴

The division of the theoretical and the practical is overcome by the fact that “*The transcendent basis must now indeed be the same basis of the being which affects us as of the being which is our own activity.*”⁸⁵ As we have seen, both Habermas and Rorty are convinced that the linguistic turn obviates questions of transcendental subjectivity, and thus helps inaugurate post-metaphysical thinking. However, it should be evident that what Schleiermacher is attempting to explore is not the subject conceived of as a stable framework of cognitive rules that ground knowledge: that model was already eliminated by his theory of the dependence of the subject’s cognition upon the externally acquired, historically developed natural language in which knowledge is articulated. The problem is that it is not wholly clear what it is that he *is* trying to explore. At the same time the question he addresses is worth investigating.

Schleiermacher’s motivation for his account of ‘immediate self-consciousness’ in the *Dialectic* initially derives from the epistemological question of how disagreement about something can occur at all if there is no continuity, which transcends any particular judgement, of the subjects who schematise that something in different ways. Such an existential continuity is linked for Schleiermacher to the irreducibility of things to what we think and say of them. This assumption is what will extend the scope of the issue beyond the narrowly epistemological, but it is also what makes interpreting Schleiermacher’s conception so difficult. Both subject and object are only *cognitively* accessible in a reflexive manner, in particular moments of inferential relatedness, but their existence must also transcend these particular reflexive moments. Habermas’ concern with one aspect of this issue is what leads him to invoke the formal realist presupposition of an objective world, which offers a way of trying to retain the idea of the object’s independence from conflicting assertions made about it, but he does not see this as leading to questions

about the self that makes these assertions. Rorty, on the other hand, claims that “the self-identity of the thing picked out” by a sentence “is itself description-relative,” nothing in his universe being immediate and non-inferential in any significant sense.⁸⁶

With regard to the object side of this relationship, Schleiermacher reflects on the judgements “A is b,” “A is not b,” such as “The substance which causes combustion is phlogiston,” “The substance which causes combustion is not phlogiston.” Phlogiston is what it is in relation to other things, and can therefore cease to be itself when this web of relations ceases to cohere because oxygen offers a more plausible account of combustion. Something analogous to Rorty’s position is touched on in relation to the difference between the judgements that “A is” and “A is not,”⁸⁷ such as “Phlogiston exists,” “Phlogiston does not exist.” Such judgements rely for Schleiermacher on the fact of being itself, as that which can be differentiated in judgements, and this difference in judgements “would no longer be a disagreement within our area, but a disagreement about the area itself.”⁸⁸ In Rorty’s terms we are “changing the subject” if we “abandon all or most of our previous beliefs” about the thing in question. The point is not fully worked out in Schleiermacher, but his consequence seems to be much the same as that drawn by Rorty. I shall return to an aspect of this ontological issue in a moment, but first we need to look at the other aspect of the problem here.

Schleiermacher’s most fundamental difference from both Habermas and Rorty lies in his conception of subjectivity and its relation to language. For both the latter, questions about subjectivity have been obviated by the linguistic turn. In Habermas’ unequivocal phrase: “everything which deserves the name subjectivity . . . owes itself to the unyieldingly individuating compulsion of the linguistic medium of processes of learning.”⁸⁹ Working from the essential Romantic assumption contained in the passage on the ‘transcendent basis of thought’, Manfred Frank suggests one reason why this position may be problematic. Knowledge is constituted in intersubjectively accessible speech acts, which identify objects in terms of their relations to other things—on this Habermas, Rorty and Schleiermacher are in agreement. Knowledge, as that which is constituted by the ability to use iterable sentences in a meaningful fashion that can be legitimated to others, also relies on something which is itself *not* propositional, is *non-relational*, *non-inferential*, and *cannot* rely on

identification, namely the self-consciousness which connects different acts as objectifiable, 'reflexive' moments for a particular thinker, making them that thinker's own acts rather than random events with no connection.⁹⁰ There must, in this view, be a link between two non-inferential aspects of what is required for things to be intelligible at all: "Just as *self-relationship* must be explained from out of the undivided unity of a pre-reflexive *self*, analogously, the relation of a subject to a predicate in a judgement must be explained via the simple unity of the absolute position or existence."⁹¹ The transcendent basis cannot, as we saw, be articulated as determinate knowledge, and it is what links our being to the rest of being. The nature of this link is what concerns Schleiermacher.

The difficulty is, of course, and this is what separates Habermas from Rorty, and Schleiermacher and Schelling from Hegel, that we have therefore to find some way of making sense of a notion of being, the 'transcendent basis'. Rorty thinks any such notion involves what he terms, in the manner of Hegel's critique of Kant, "the pointless, because tautologous, claim that something we define as being beyond our knowledge is, alas, beyond our knowledge."⁹² He sees the choice here between his own de-absolutised, anti-essentialist Hegelianism, and a scientific essentialism which thinks we know things in themselves when we get to elementary particles. In Schleiermacher's case the answer to this ontological issue may ultimately be that what is beyond our knowledge takes us from philosophy into theology, which, as you will have gathered, is not what interests me here. However, there are other dimensions to the question of what is 'beyond knowledge'. In the case of self-knowledge something analogous to what is entailed in the 'simple unity of the absolute position or existence' applies to the movement between knowing and willing, receptivity and spontaneity, if these moves are to constitute intelligible experience. Moreover, the very possibility of understanding conflicting assertions, especially about oneself, depends upon a continuity that cannot be based upon the subject's propositional self-identifications, because these have the same status as any other predicative assertions. As we have seen, both Habermas and Rorty agree that all identifications are themselves inferential and fallible in the manner of what is justifiably assertible. Even if we, as Davidson and Rorty suggest, have 'multiple selves' these can only be understood as multiple (and *as selves*) on the basis of some kind of identity which transcends their particular instantiations.

There seems, therefore, to be a possible link between ‘immediate self-consciousness’ and the ‘transcendent basis’ which is the presupposition of all possible judgements, about which, though, as we saw, nothing cognitive can be said. This kind of idea is present throughout Schleiermacher’s work from at least as early as *On Religion*, and is the aspect of his thinking that contributed to Heidegger’s development of the notion of ‘being in the world’. Habermas insists on a kind of transcendent basis as a formal presupposition for the knowledge of objects, but thinks that with regard to the subject it is catered for by the linguistic turn, in which being a subject means being able to use the pronoun ‘I’ correctly in order to individuate oneself in relation to ‘you’, ‘he’, and so on. Both he and Rorty therefore assume that any kind of connection between self and world that is not conceived of in cognitive, propositional terms is philosophically empty. This is where the issue becomes both most difficult and most interesting. The totality which Habermas formally presupposes is the world seen from the realist’s view from nowhere, and Rorty thinks there is nothing to say about this: whereas we have norms for talking about snow, we don’t for talking about ‘Reality’. In terms of the specific debate concerning the nature of objectivity, it may indeed be, then, that the option is between the realist, the Habermasian formal realist and other transcendently-informed pragmatist views, and the Rortian positions. While Schleiermacher, as we have seen, has much of interest to say regarding these alternatives, he is not least worth looking at anew because he insists on a further dimension which sees the issue of transcendence as philosophically significant in way that is not concerned with the possibility of objective knowledge.

The questions which Schleiermacher can remind us of in this respect have mainly emerged in modern philosophy via the disruptive role of the aesthetic. Tony Cascardi refers to “Kant’s conviction that the concept-driven fields of cognition and morality cannot possibly account for all there is of knowledge,” and this conviction leads Kant to his attention in the *Critique of Judgement* to the affective dimension of our relations to the world which is not reducible to concepts.⁹³ Schleiermacher’s reflections on self, language and world similarly seek to sustain the idea of connections to the world which cannot be wholly accounted for theoretically and can therefore only be experienced in forms of articulation and expression which make possible a sense of a different relationship to things from the cognitive and the ethical.⁹⁴ In the present context the sense that meaning cannot be adequately characterised

solely in terms of the intersubjective acceptance or rejection of speech acts points to a conception of subjectivity that would be more open to the other ways in which we experience our being in the world and articulate it than either Habermas or Rorty allow when considering the options of post-metaphysical thinking. While rightly seeking to get us out of scepticism-generating Cartesian preoccupations, they assume that questions of subjectivity are either *merely* a residue of pointless epistemological hang-ups concerning how the objective can be represented by the subjective, or that they entail a misleading idea of access to what is beyond language. Even though, for example, neither Habermas nor Rorty ignores the significance of the conceptually irreducible role of metaphor in world-disclosure they have, as Frank has argued, nothing convincing to offer that would account for what it is about us which displaces and extends existing forms of articulation and allows these displacements to become socially significant, most obviously in aesthetic practice. Along with his importance in the genesis of modern conceptions of language, knowledge, and ethics, Schleiermacher's work still offers resources for widening the focus of how subjectivity can be usefully discussed after the linguistic turn, and this is perhaps best apparent in the way he explores a key link between language and aesthetics.

The decisive changes in the understanding of language associated with Herder, Hamann, Humboldt and Schleiermacher, which take place at the time of the origins of post-metaphysical thinking, and without which, as Rorty acknowledges, neither his own nor Habermas' conceptions would be possible, mean that language is understood as revealing aspects of the world and ourselves which cannot even be assumed already to exist before their articulation in language. This has a consequence to which attention is still too rarely directed in recent philosophy. Forms of articulation which are not understood as linguistic if language is conceived of solely in the representational terms characteristic of 'metaphysics' can come to be understood as linguistic if they disclose otherwise inaccessible aspects of the world. At the end of the eighteenth century both the way music is talked about and the way it is created undergo a major change, in which it comes to be valued for its capacity for 'saying' what nothing else can, an idea summed up in Schlegel's question: "is the theme in [music] not as developed, confirmed, varied and contrasted as the object of meditation in a sequence of philosophical ideas?"⁹⁵ The change in music and the change in conceptions of language and knowledge are evidently connected.

In the wake of the tradition of thinking about language associated with Herder and others that Charles Taylor terms 'constitutive', Rorty asks the question "At what point in biological evolution did organisms stop just coping with reality and start representing it?" and suggests: "Maybe they never *did* start representing it."⁹⁶ He also claims that something similar applies to language: "there was no decisive moment at which language stopped being a series of reactions to the stimuli provided by the behaviour of other humans and started to be an instrument for expressing beliefs."⁹⁷ In that case, though, why does Rorty restrict the scope of language by excluding questions of self-consciousness and by not considering the related idea that early forms of language could have been connected to 'music', understood in the sense, for example, of expressive and potentially innovative, rather than merely 'reactive' articulation. Rorty's hero Wittgenstein points to what I want to suggest here when he claims that "Understanding a sentence in language is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one thinks,"⁹⁸ and he links poetry to music via the idea of there being "something which only these words in these positions express."⁹⁹ This "something" cannot therefore be cashed out propositionally. Schleiermacher connects this idea to his notion of "style," the locus of individuality in language: "nobody can get out of language," but "the individual (*das Individuelle*) must remain within language, in the form of combination."¹⁰⁰ This idea equally applies to music, where the same elements are employed within a musical tradition, individuality resulting from the differences in the way the elements are linked together. It is this linkage that connects this perception of language and music to immediate self-consciousness.

The fact that Rorty here restricts his initial characterisation of language to its being 'reactions to stimuli' without considering its expressive, productive dimension, essentially divides him from what Schleiermacher is proposing, and suggests a way in which he may still be stuck in aspects of the empiricism he elsewhere so convincingly rejects. Rorty regards language as "a way of abbreviating the kinds of complicated interactions with the rest of the universe which are unique to the higher anthropoids. These interactions are marked by the use of strings of noises and marks to facilitate group activities, as tools for coordinating the activities of individuals."¹⁰¹ All of this could again, of course, apply to music in relation to our affective life, but this is not how Rorty sees it because he fails to attend to how the strings of noises can

become significant via linkages which are not simply syntactical or semantic. Crucial to what we now mean by language is, Rorty maintains, the development of “semantical metalanguage,” in which we can “say things like, ‘It is also called ‘Y’, but for your purposes you should describe it as X.’”¹⁰² Even this, of course, involves what we saw Schleiermacher describing in terms of schematism, which essentially depends on the ability to create metaphors, by seeing something as something else. However, the very ability variously to designate an object in this way requires, as Schleiermacher insists, the non-inferential continuity of the subject: if the object is only the same under a description the continuity which allows for re-description has to be on the side of the subject that describes.

For Schleiermacher thoughts are robbed of their intelligibility without their connection to some ground of identity, and this is why ‘feeling’ is vital to thought: “The demand that unity and difference should always be together is fulfilled for symbolising activity by the fact that thought and feeling are everywhere together,”¹⁰³ or in another formulation: “Feeling and the principle of combination are One. For self-consciousness comes between each moment, because otherwise the acts would be indistinguishable.”¹⁰⁴ In an added note he suggests, “If one goes a step further then all action as combination [by which he means judgement] is grounded in feeling.”¹⁰⁵ The further vital phenomenon here is that we do not just exchange sentences, but also other forms of articulation which can themselves even be necessary for the functioning of the semantic, such as rhythm, which Schelling termed the “music in music.”¹⁰⁶ Rhythm, which relies upon identity in difference, is precisely dependent for its being rhythm at all upon a pre-reflexive continuity of the subject, and it can bring about a kind of affective contact with things that engages us in ways which cannot be stated in verbal language. What does Beethoven’s revolutionising of musical rhythm mean if it is not a way of extending the imaginative possibilities of our existence *in precisely* the kind of ways Rorty demands for post-metaphysical thinking? The question is how such phenomena fit into the image of post-metaphysical thinking if all questions of subjectivity are supposedly obviated by the linguistic turn.

In immediate self-consciousness each relational moment of our individual experience which we can objectify in relation to other moments depends on there already having been a “complete [hence immediate] taking up of the

whole of existence in a moment"¹⁰⁷ which is "not in our power to possess" but which "gives rise to free activities" that relate to "the connection of the whole with the individual life."¹⁰⁸ Think of how listening to a piece of music can integrate one's affective state into a sound world that is able to make more sense of the world we inhabit. This world makes far more connections than reach the propositional level, and some of the connections are not necessarily articulable in words. Given Schleiermacher's rejection of a subject-object dichotomy, the proximity of this notion to the early Heidegger's explorations of the notion of world is not surprising. Many aspects of our existence, such as moods, which, as the early Heidegger shows, are inseparable from our being in the world, are neither reducible to the ways we talk about them, nor merely inarticulate. In remarks on music Schleiermacher maintains: "The connection of artistic productivity with the movements of self-consciousness, which are so immediately connected with activity in the movements of life, is . . . unmistakably the main issue in musical production,"¹⁰⁹ and he connects this idea to language: "just as the infinity of combination of articulated sounds belongs to human thought being able to appear in language, so the manifold of measured (*gemessen*) sounds represents the whole manifold of movements of self-consciousness, to the extent that they are not ideas, but real states of life."¹¹⁰ Linking feeling to gesture, and contrasting it with verbal language, he argues that "we can admittedly become aware of the feeling of another by its expression, but without being able to take it up into ourselves and to transform it into our own."¹¹¹ This is because "the single life expresses itself in its difference" in immediate self-consciousness.¹¹² Whereas intersubjective propositional knowledge involves "asserting and imagining (*Nachbilden*)," what is at issue here is only an "intimation and a guessing, not a coming to an understanding, but rather a revelation."¹¹³ This can again easily be interpreted both in relation to what music may 'say' to us, and, of course, in the direction of theology. Importantly, though, Schleiermacher insists that revelation does not mean "something supernatural, but only the universally human."¹¹⁴

The challenge of this kind of expression is that it pertains to the 'universally human' precisely by its inherent individuality and irreducibility, not via a—metaphysical—universal concept of the human. One major point of attention to the aesthetic in modern culture is that it can involve the attempt to articulate a universality that escapes reduction to conceptuality. The simple ques-

tion is why the modern period should give rise to the new notion of aesthetics, and why forms such as music become so significant: this clearly has something to do with the nature of subjects' self-understanding in a post-theological world. Even though we share an irreducibility to each other this sharing does not mean our differences can be transcended in a Hegelian manner, or in the linguistic manner of Hegel's heirs. What is at issue for Schleiermacher are precisely forms of articulation which cannot be conceptually generalised but which can yet generate universal significances. Schleiermacher's idea of revelation therefore keeps open the sense that what we seek to communicate extends beyond Rorty's ways of "abbreviating . . . complicated interactions with the rest of the universe."

The basic question here is, then, how we interpret the nature and significance of the linguistic turn. While it may well be that epistemological questions concerning knowledge as representation can be obviated in the manner we have seen in aspects of both Schleiermacher and contemporary thinkers, Schleiermacher's approach sustains a different kind of epistemological dimension that has important ethical overtones. This approach has been echoed in Brandom's recent contention that:

What matters about us *morally*, and so ultimately, *politically* is . . . the capacity of each of us as discursive creatures to say things that no-one else has ever said, things furthermore that would never have been said if we did not say them. It is our capacity to transform the vocabularies in which we live and move and have our being.¹¹⁵

The transformations in question take place, as Habermas argues, in differentiated cognitive, ethical and aesthetic spheres into which modern subjects are socialised, but the fact that we are the kind of being who most matters because of this capacity to transform vocabularies in *any* sphere raises one of the most vital questions on the agenda of contemporary philosophy. The real questions here are how these spheres relate and how transitions can be made between them. This is what determines modern culture and this is where the dangers in modern culture which critical thinking can help reveal are located. If, for example, one accepts that one crucial 'vocabulary' that we can transform and move within is music, then the nature of the linguistic turn in relation to questions of self-consciousness needs re-thinking by better integrating it with reflections on the nature of affective existence as a decisive location of

what matters to people. Some of the reasons for doing this can be briefly suggested by a few final observations.

Schleiermacher's account of self-consciousness and individuality highlights a dimension that much modern philosophy has neglected. The problem in re-assessing Schleiermacher's philosophy in this respect lies in the connection between his ontological claims about the transcendent ground and immediate self-consciousness, and the implications he draws from these claims for the aesthetic and its role in social existence. If the connection he establishes can be made to do real work then the following distinction, which is central to Rorty's conception of the contemporary situation, needs reconsidering. Rorty talks of private, ironic "projects of individual self-development," the "'paradigm' of which is 'romantic art'," and another paradigm of which "may be" religion. He contrasts them with public "projects of social cooperation," like the natural sciences, which are based on propositional claims, and are separate from the private, world-disclosive articulations associated with what is meant by 'feeling' in the sense employed in this essay.¹¹⁶ Although Rorty admits that there may sometimes be transitions between these projects, so that projects of individual self-development can have effects on projects of social cooperation, he sees the separation as a crucial basis for distinguishing between what belongs in the political sphere and what belongs merely to forming a "private self-image."¹¹⁷ This is what allows him to take someone like Heidegger seriously as a 'private' philosopher, despite his abject political failings.

This is an intriguing manoeuvre that has some justification on the light of the dangers German philosophy revealed when it related the public and the private in a disastrous way.¹¹⁸ However, Rorty does not countenance the idea that this separation, which involves the farewell to any sense that the spheres of modern experience might become more integrated, may yet also be an indicator of significant problems in Western societies, where the effects of the privatisation of individual culture have more to do with the culture industry than with real cultural liberation of individuals. The negative contemporary political effects of this privatisation have yet to be really understood, but Rorty's position offers few resources for asking serious questions about them. The power of Rorty's distinction is, though, in certain respects undeniable—it can be linked, for example, to Hegel's ideas about the end of art as a deci-

sive location of truth in modernity and it reminds us of the real dominant influences on contemporary cultural life. However, the point of Hegel's conception was to privilege philosophy and science, whereas Rorty, of course, is concerned to bring to an end the idea of philosophy's role as ultimate legislator and to counter scientific approaches in philosophy.

It is, then, not that Rorty underestimates the significance of the aesthetic: he argues with regard to the irrelevance of so much philosophical ethics to real ethical life, for example, that "Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created."¹⁹ It is created aesthetically by extension of the capacity to imagine the world of the other as a suffering being, an aim thoroughly in accord with Schleiermacher's thinking, and one which Rorty thinks the novel often achieves more effectively than philosophical texts. The differences between Schleiermacher and Rorty may, then, in many respects be themselves a manifestation of how historical circumstances colour philosophical investments and how philosophical investments may mask other approaches to social and political issues. Rorty's concern to get beyond conceptions of subjectivity of a Kantian or empiricist nature that lead to the old epistemological problems of joining scheme and content is itself generated by a particular philosophical constellation—the empiricist domination of analytical philosophy he wishes to overcome—that prejudices his conception in the direction of a particular approach to the linguistic turn. Schleiermacher's insistence on attempting to give an account of subjectivity, despite his already making the linguistic turn, relates to concerns in his period about the German Idealist reduction of the individuality of real subjects to their subsumption into universality, and the concomitant tendency to arrogate to philosophy a grounding role in culture. The challenge suggested by Schleiermacher lies, therefore, in his reminder of the possibilities of new reflections upon self-consciousness that need not lead merely to a return to outworn philosophical conceptions. The difficulties here are formidable, but at a time when philosophers are finding novel resources in Hegel, they might also be wise to take a look at one of his most effective, but as yet most ignored opponents.

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Notes

- ¹ An earlier version of this essay was given as the keynote lecture of the "Schleiermacher 2000" Conference, Drew University, April 7th 2000, and a much abbreviated version of it appeared in *Schleiermacher's Dialektik. Die Liebe zum Wissen in Philosophie und Theologie*, eds. Christine Helmer, Christiane Kranich und Birgit Rehme-Iffert, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2003.
- ² This is the case despite the widespread claims that Kant was no longer philosophically defensible which accompanied the rise of logical empiricism and dominated much Anglo-Saxon philosophy from the 1930's to the 1960's. On contemporary changes in the perception of this period of philosophy, see A. Bowie, "The Romantic Connection: Neurath, the Frankfurt School, and Heidegger," Parts 1 and 2, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 279-298; vol. 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 459-483.
- ³ See Andrew Bowie, "John McDowell's *Mind and World*, and Early Romantic Epistemology," in *Revue internationale de philosophie*, vol. 50, no. 197, 3/1996, pp. 515-54.
- ⁴ For further attempts in this direction see A. Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory. The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*, London, Routledge, 1997, and A. Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity. From Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003.
- ⁵ Cited in eds. M. Bauer and D.O. Dahlstrom, *The Emergence of German Idealism*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1999, p. 62.
- ⁶ Habermas' pragmatized version of this idea states that "understanding an expression means knowing how one can use it in order to come to an understanding (*sich verständigen*) with someone about something" (Jürgen Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 176). As we will see below the crucial notion of *Verständigung*, which, for Habermas, replaces attempts to establish theories of reference, is already used in much the same way by Schleiermacher.
- ⁷ It is perhaps worth noting at this point that I think Gadamer tends too readily to elide the irreducible differences involved in any process of transmission: as Schleiermacher suggests, the possibility of false understanding is ever-present, even though there has to be some ground of agreement for any kind of communication between past and present to be possible at all.
- ⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 36.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ¹⁰ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, ed. Rudolf Odebrecht, Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1942, p. 77. By 'art' Schleiermacher generally means an activity involving rules for which there are no rules for the application of those rules. The significance of this will become apparent later.

- ¹¹ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 247.
- ¹² Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen (1800-1807) (Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, Volume 12)*, Munich, Paderborn, Vienna, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1964, pp. 316-7.
- ¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Naturphilosophie*, ed. Manfred Frank and Véronique Zanetti, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996, pp. 923-4.
- ¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, pp. 137-8.
- ¹⁵ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. L. Jonas, Berlin, Reimer, 1839, p. 103.
- ¹⁶ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1990, p. 107.
- ¹⁷ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 103.
- ¹⁸ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 379.
- ¹⁹ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 41.
- ²⁰ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 487.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ²² Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, p. 256.
- ²³ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 141. Rorty similarly says we should "think of our uses of words, and of our beliefs, as just worldly objects in constant causal interaction with other worldly objects" (Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers Volume Three*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 108). The question will be, though, to what extent this obviates all questions about self-consciousness, of the kind vital to Schleiermacher.
- ²⁴ Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, p. 15.
- ²⁵ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 374.
- ²⁶ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 87.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- ²⁹ This would seem to be what McDowell and Brandom mean by objective, which Habermas refers to as 'Begriffsrealismus', and which seems to me to explain McDowell's and Brandom's attachment to Hegelian absolute idealism (though Brandom strangely seems to think Hegel is an 'objective idealist', which makes it unclear what Hegel therefore means by 'absolute' as opposed to 'objective' spirit).
- ³⁰ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 492.
- ³¹ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, pp. 19-21.
- ³² Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 61.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ³⁴ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 53.
- ³⁵ Rorty, 1999, p. 167.
- ³⁶ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1999, p. 39.

- ³⁷ Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 39.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.
- ³⁹ On Schelling, see Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1993.
- ⁴⁰ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik (1811)*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1986, p. 68.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- ⁴² Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 108.
- ⁴³ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 145.
- ⁴⁴ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 219.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁴⁹ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 330.
- ⁵⁰ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 248.
- ⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 28.
- ⁵² Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 287.
- ⁵³ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, pp. 480-1.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 511.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.
- ⁵⁶ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 481.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 483.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 487.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ⁶² Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 38.
- ⁶³ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 69.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 563.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- ⁶⁷ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 35.
- ⁶⁸ Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 2.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 3.
- ⁷⁰ Novalis, *Band 2 Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl, Munich Vienna, Hanser, 1978, p. 8.
- ⁷¹ Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 208.
- ⁷² Cited in Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 161.

- ⁷³ Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, p. 328.
- ⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 241.
- ⁷⁵ Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 109.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109. Schleiermacher also stresses the primacy of truth, insisting that "Error will always have a ground of truth upon which it rests," as when one attaches a false predicate to a subject we both acknowledge exists. (Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 334) The point for both is that we can only identify falsehoods because they are manifest against a much broader background of largely undisputed truths.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 27.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231. Cf. Rorty's idea that we are tied to the world causally, but not representationally.
- ⁸¹ Some of what Schleiermacher says about immediate self-consciousness seems to me pretty unhelpful, and not necessarily consistent with what he says elsewhere, but in other respects the term raises important questions.
- ⁸² Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dialektik*, p. 270.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- ⁸⁶ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 56.
- ⁸⁷ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik (1814-15). Einleitung zur Dialektik (1833)*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1988, p. 135.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- ⁸⁹ Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, p. 34.
- ⁹⁰ Arguments for this are set out in Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1991, and, as he shows, are shared by significant parts of the recent philosophy of mind.
- ⁹¹ Manfred Frank, 'Unendliche Annäherung'. *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1997, p. 672.
- ⁹² Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 58.
- ⁹³ Anthony J. Cascardi, 1999, *Consequences of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 101.
- ⁹⁴ Stanley Cavell's work often suggests the importance of such a relationship.
- ⁹⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente 1-6*, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1988, p. 155.
- ⁹⁶ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 269.

- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p., 74.
- ⁹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 227.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227. Adorno talks in this connection of 'judgementless synthesis' in the Beethoven book.
- ¹⁰⁰ Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, p. 323.
- ¹⁰¹ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 64.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 65. It can be argued that music can also function metalinguistically, for example when Mahler used an ironic version of a piece of musical material to refer to a serious version of the same material.
- ¹⁰³ Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, pp. 260-1.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73. Kant says something similar in the third Critique. Kant maintains that a 'common sense', of the kind 'required for the universal communicability of a feeling', is 'the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition' (I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. B66).
- ¹⁰⁶ Samuel Wheeler says that "Worthwhile 'learning' is not just the ingestion of propositions but rather a whole complex of states that cannot be divided into the cognitive and 'other' . . . This inseparable mix of the 'cognitive' with the 'other' is characteristic of learning generally, not just of the kind of learning we derive from poetry." Samuel C. Wheeler III, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 110.
- ¹⁰⁷ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, Berlin, Reimer, 1842, p. 122.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 394.
- ¹¹¹ Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, p. 268.
- ¹¹² Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, p. 76.
- ¹¹³ Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812/13)*, p. 268.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁵ Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, Cambridge Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 178.
- ¹¹⁶ See for example, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- ¹¹⁸ Andrew Bowie, *Introduction to German Philosophy. From Kant to Habermas*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003.
- ¹¹⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. xvi.

Christoph Menke

The Presence of Tragedy*

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that modernity can only be properly understood when tragedy is viewed as one of the conditions internal to it. Modernity and tragedy are not mutually exclusive, as Hegel and Schlegel, for example both argue, but mutually inclusive. Each is determined by the other—as tragic modernity and as modern tragedy.

KEYWORDS: Modernity, tragedy, tragic irony, Hegel, Nietzsche

“The Presence of Tragedy”—this title makes an assertion: the assertion that there are at present tragedies or that tragedy is present to us, that our present is one of tragedies. The initial, obvious meaning of this assertion is a polemical one. The assertion of the presence of tragedy repudiates the view that ‘for us’ to offer a variation on Hegel’s most famous formulation on art, tragedy might well have become “a thing of the past,”¹ or as Schlegel surmises, might one day become “antiquated.”² ‘For us’ means for Hegel as well as for Schlegel: for us moderns. The view to be repudiated by the eponymous assertion of the presence of tragedy is the view that modernity is the time after tragedy. The thesis that

the title of the presence of tragedy proposes to advance with regard to this view is a twofold one: that modernity as well as tragedy can only be properly understood when modernity is recognised as the presence of tragedy, the presence of tragedy in modernity. Modernity and tragedy are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually inclusive. Each must be determined by the other: as tragic modernity and modern tragedy.

I. Theory of Modernity, Theory of Tragedy

One aspect of the thesis of the presence of tragedy proposes that the concepts of tragedy and modernity are coupled to one another systematically. In this respect, the thesis of the presence of tragedy ties in to a tradition that goes back over two hundred years, a tradition in which the inquiry into the characteristics of modernity had always been infused with the inquiry into the nature of tragedy—a tradition that has developed from the thought of Schelling and Hegel to that of Simmel, Weber and Freud, from the ideas of Lessing and Schiller to those of Benjamin, Gehlen and Foucault. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, it is impossible to imagine any inquiry into the signature of modernity that has not carried as a central focus the topic, the *problem* of tragedy.³ This tradition seems at present, in the philosophical debates on modernity under the sign of the postmodern, to have, with few exceptions, been broken. It is this break that needs to be re-examined.

To this end, a brief preliminary remark on the tradition to be resumed is required. In the realm of historical-philosophical thought about modernity there are, generally speaking, two eventful phases to be discerned in which the inquiry into tragedy assumed central prominence: at the turn of the nineteenth century, between the periods of late Enlightenment and Idealism, with consequences reaching as far as Nietzsche, and in the first third of the twentieth century, between the formative phase of sociology and the rise of Critical Theory, with repercussions that lasted into the 1950s. If for the first period one can speak of a 'romantic' paradigm of the reflection on tragedy, I would like to refer to that of the second phase as the 'mythical' paradigm.

In both paradigms, the romantic and the mythical, the relationship between modernity and tragedy assumes central significance and a negative character. In both paradigms, the attempts to define modernity and tragedy are carried out in *one* move: a *countermove*; for them, tragedy is where modernity is not. For the rest, however, the romantic and the mythical paradigms differ from one another completely. In the romantic paradigm, tragedy is the figure of the beginning of modernity, in the mythical, that of its end. In the mythical model—as Max Weber and Carl Schmitt maintain, as Rosenzweig and Benjamin criticise—tragedy represents the situation of irreconcilable struggles into which modernity, its monotheistically inspired hopes of redemption falling into decay, finds itself dissolving. Max Weber described the end of modernity thus, in now famous words, as the returning of the fundamental condition of the tragic-mythical world of the ancients: “We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons”: “Many old gods ascend from their graves . . . They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle.”⁴ In the mythical paradigm tragedy embodies the formation into which modernity will relapse. In the first, romantic model—in the view of such disparate authors as Schlegel, Schelling, and Hegel, indeed even Nietzsche (in his middle period)—tragedy represents, on the other, hand the world from which modernity has arisen by overcoming it. Here, modernity is the formation that comes after tragedy and tragedy is not post-modern, as it is in the mythical paradigm, but rather pre-modern: “Three predominant literary genres,” writes Schlegel in a note: “1) *Tragedy* for the Greeks 2) *Satire* for the Romans 3) *Novel* [for] the moderns.”⁵ If the mythical conception of tragedy formulates a theory of the eclipse of modernity—back to tragedy—then the romantic conception formulates one of modernity’s progress: through tragedy and beyond.

Here I have briefly brought to mind these two forms of reflection on tragedy and modernity in order to, taking them as a backdrop, briefly sketch the present stance of discussion in which the following reasoning has its starting point. This stance is determined by a hidden, indeed for the most part unnoticed and unconsidered continuing influence of the romantic paradigm.⁶ Central positions in the present philosophical debate about the correct understanding of the modern situation according to my contention, may only be appropriately understood as the inexplicit continuation of the romantic paradigm. Thereby, *both* elements of this formulation are important: the

romantic paradigm is continued in these present positions through the taking over of fundamental elements of the romantic concept of modernity. Since the continuation remains inexplicit, however, the *context of justification*, which, under the romantic paradigm, links the concept of modernity to tragedy, is lost.

The continuation of the romantic paradigm refers to the way in which it has characterised modernity as the time after tragedy. In the romantic paradigm there are two central concepts for this: the concept of the autonomous subject and that of the transgressive play.⁷ Both are concepts of a post-tragic situation: the principle of subjectivity as well as the practise of play are figures of the overcoming of tragedy. They describe that situation, and in doing so the overcoming of tragedy in modernity, but in two completely different ways.

The *autonomous subject* overcomes tragedy because it is the instance of solving ethical conflicts. The autonomous subject attains this power of resolving conflict through its power of reason to dissolve all pre-given conditions and guidelines. For tragic, that is to say unsolvable conflicts, exist only where the subject is under inscrutable and therefore unchecked conditions. Raising the subject beyond these conditions on the other hand, therefore, the gaining of autonomy makes the dissolving of practical conflicts possible in principle. Reason, as stated at the end of Hegel's 'subjective logic' is "to be recognised as the epitome of never-ending power against which no object can afford resistance."⁸ This is why the autonomous subject is a principle of the overcoming of tragedy: it denies the existence of unsolvable, practical conflicts that form the ethical-political content of tragedy. There is no tragedy without tragic; that is to say, without such unsolvable ethical-political conflicts. Through the power of dissolving practical conflicts, the autonomous subject disperses tragedy itself.

The second figure of the romantic paradigm, the figure of the transgressive play, explains the same dispersion of tragedy in a different way. Tragedy can only bear a content of tragic-unsolvable conflicts if tragedy presents these conflicts in a certain way—if, or rather, because, it is a certain kind of representation. It is a representation that is defined through its presented content, as its meaning. This is confronted by the romantic paradigm, by its idea of play with a form of representation which, in the movement of representation, transgresses its content and meaning: a movement of representation

that is no longer determined by its content and its meaning, but rather follows its own, playful logic of “illusion.” In the play of “illusion,” however—in the “comedy of art” as Nietzsche romantically says in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and its “entertainment”⁹—there is no tragic element and consequently no more tragedy. “Illusion” and “play” are a second way in which the romantic paradigm thinks out the dissolution of tragedy.

I assume—without being able to prove it in detail here—that both these figures in which the romantic paradigm has begun to consider the post-tragic situation of the modern, are easily recognisable in the current debates. In particular the discussion about the postmodern condition has come to a head over the contrast between the autonomous subject and transgressive play. Looking back on the romantic paradigm of the theory of modernity it can be shown, however, that the two figures are moving on an even level, for both of them are figures that rest on the contention of modernity as a time after tragedy. The romantic diagnosis still determines the central positions in the current debate on the condition of modernity, and it determines them in the two aforementioned figures of the autonomous subject and the transgressive play.¹⁰ At the same time, however, the basic thesis and the basic figures of the romantic paradigm have only been recognised, in those contemporary positions, in a one-sided, and halved manner: namely, only in their descriptive, but not in their explanatory content.

The descriptive content of the romantic paradigm consists in its formulation of a certain diagnosis of modernity. The romantic paradigm describes modernity as a time after tragedy—as a situation, therefore, where the figures of the autonomous subject and of transgressive play have *replaced* tragedy. That is the thesis that has stuck in the current philosophical self-representation of modernity as a post-tragic time. At the same time, the romantic paradigm does more, without which the thesis could not be properly understood: the romantic paradigm *explains* the emergence of the post-tragic situation of modernity, and indeed it explains it, seemingly paradoxically, *by* the earlier formation that is replaced by modernity, that is to say, the formation of tragedy. The romantic paradigm defines modernity as the overcoming of tragedy but it grounds this process of the overcoming of tragedy, which leads to modernity, in tragedy itself. The death of tragedy, from which modernity is born is a death by its own hand; tragedy “died by suicide.”¹¹ Moreover, it is precisely

this self-inflicted death by which tragedy gives birth to modernity. Tragedy generates through and in itself, that by which it is then overcome and replaced. Therefore, in the romantic paradigm, the theory of modernity—as a post-tragic time—is founded in a theory of tragedy—as a process of self-overcoming. This foundation in a theory of tragedy has gone astray in the current positions that reformulate the romantic figures of subject and play. Without this foundation, however, its assurance that modernity can actually *be* a post-tragic time lacks any power of conviction.

This determines the way in which I will proceed in my attempt to defend the anti-romantic thesis of the presence of tragedy. I will *not* explain this thesis through attempting a description of modernity that, in contrast to the figures of autonomous subjectivity and transgressive play, claims the continuing existence of tragic conflicts; on this I will only make some provisional insinuations in the conclusion (sect. V). Here I will rather defend the assertion of the presence of tragedy in an indirect way: through an examination and critique of the romantic thesis that tragedy itself consists of the process of its self-dissolution through the producing of the post-tragic figures of autonomous subjectivity and transgressive play. To this purpose, I will first recapitulate how the romantic paradigm arrives at its interpretation of tragedy (II). I would then like to show that the central *texts* of the romantic paradigm themselves already supply the insights that place its central argument in question. To this end, I shall make reference to two authors, between whom commonly—in Karl Löwith’s classic formulation¹²—a “revolutionary break” is seen: Hegel, above all his *Phenomenology of Mind*, and Nietzsche, with what could be called his second book on tragedy, *The Gay Science*. For both of these thinkers, though each in different ways, call into question the romantic conception of tragedy they espouse. Nietzsche does so with his thesis of the inevitable recurrence of tragic struggles (III), and Hegel with his description of the figure of tragic irony (IV).

II. The Process of Tragedy

The romantic paradigm begins its attempt to define tragedy with a first and fundamental step, which was mentioned indirectly in the introductory remarks. There it was shown that the concept of tragedy operates on two levels or belongs in a twofold register: in one pertaining to theories of conflict and in

one pertaining to theories of representation. In a general way, these two dimensions can be characterised with the expressions with which Kierkegaard reformulated the romantic twofold definition of tragedy: as “ethical” and “aesthetic.”¹³ Tragedy is not an element in one of these two Kierkegaardian spheres, but belongs to the area in which they overlap. If we initially continue to employ a Kierkegaardian terminology, then we can say that tragedy is an ethical phenomenon through the experience of the tragic and an aesthetic one through the experience of play. Here, ‘the tragic’ characterises the ethically experienced irresolvability of conflicts and ‘play’ the aesthetic implementation of a freely performed positing and dissolution of meaning.¹⁴ Tragedy is both: the locus of tragic experience *and* playful implementations. Even more: tragedy is the place of the tension-charged relationship between tragic experience and playful implementations.

A decisive step in the inquiry into the presence of tragedy is the second one that leads to tragedy’s romantic definition. According to this definition, the two dimensions of tragedy, its ethical and its aesthetic dimension do not stand in an external relationship of difference or opposition, but rather in one of process. This results from the romantic definition of the aesthetic dimension of play. For as play, the aesthetic dimension of tragedy implies a *dissolution* of its ethical dimension of the tragic. The aesthetic experience of the play of and in tragedy does not stand beside the ethical experience of the tragic, for from the perspective of aesthetic experience the ethical experience of the tragic does not exist. The aesthetic experience of play dissolves that which is a prerequisite to all ethical experience, particularly that of tragedy: the seriousness of ethical demands and of the corresponding obligations.

The tragic and play are therefore not merely two different dimensions of tragedy, because tragedy as aesthetic play is a dissolution of the tragic. This provided the romantic tragedy paradigm with the formula of the dissolution, or more precisely the *self*-dissolution of tragedy into comedy. It is *as* aesthetic play, or through its aesthetic play that tragedy becomes comedy—if one takes ‘comedy’ to mean that particular form of representation which carries out without resistance and therefore completely the true character of all aesthetic representation, that is, its character as play. Tragedy consists not merely in the tension between the ethically experienced tragic and aesthetically experienced play; tragedy consists in the process from the ethically experienced

tragic to aesthetically experienced play. Tragedy *consists* in the dissolution of itself—as representation of the tragic—into the aesthetic play of comedy. This is the very centre of the romantic theory of tragedy: that tragedy prepares the way for its own downfall. Romantic theory, however, does not see in this the “tragedy of tragedy,”¹⁵ as Nabokov does with a view to the drama of the first half of the twentieth century, but rather the comedy of tragedy. The self-inflicted downfall of tragedy is its transition into comedy, a transition it brings about itself.

If one has followed the romantic theory of tragedy up to this point, to the insight into tragedy’s character as a process, one is but a small step away from calling into question its presence in modernity. This step consists in interpreting the tragedy process teleologically. The two authors I shall use as examples to elucidate the romantic paradigm, Hegel and Nietzsche, took this step, even if they did so in different ways. For Nietzsche as well as Hegel conceived of the tragedy process as an experiential, even a learning process: as a process by which we gain a new standpoint or perspective. The core of this process—Hegel and Nietzsche agree here as well—is formed by the overcoming of the tragic, the overcoming of an ethical perspective for which tragic-irresolvable conflicts still exist. Where Nietzsche and Hegel differ radically is in the question of the way in which this overcoming of the tragic takes place.

Nietzsche, accordingly, reads the dissolution of the (ethically experienced) tragic into (aesthetically experienced) play as the ultimate overcoming of the ethical perspective, which leads to a perspective that is merely aesthetic. The tragedy process leads us to a state in which ethical experience and thereby the tragedy of irresolvable conflicts no longer exists. If, however, these no longer exist, then there can no longer be—that is, there *need* no longer be—any tragedies. Tragedy renders itself superfluous—through its success, through the successful establishment of an aesthetic, a post-ethical and consequently a post-tragic perspective. When the tragic disappears, so too does tragedy, in the aesthetic play of comedy. This is how Nietzsche, in the first section of *The Gay Science*, describes the end of the tragedy process: “the short tragedy always gave way again and returned into the eternal comedy of existence; and the ‘waves of uncountable laughter’—to cite Aeschylus—must in the end overwhelm even the greatest of these tragedians.”¹⁶

Hegel, too, contends that tragedy overcomes the tragic through its self-dissolution into comedy, but he substantiates this claim differently: in tragedy, he sees not a process that successfully leads out of the ethical perspective and into the aesthetic perspective, thereby depriving the experience of the tragic of its very foundation. What happens, according to Hegel, is that the tragedy process brings about a change in the ethical dimension itself. To wit, this change leads *from* a tragically constituted ethical experience, by way of aesthetic dissolution *through* play, *to* a post-tragic ethical experience. The aesthetic experience of play is for Hegel not an end-point, but a dialectical “transit point” in the overcoming of the tragic. Hegel describes this in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, on the last pages of the chapter on “Religion in the Form of Art,” at the transition to “Revealed Religion” (which in its utterly limitless promise of redemption knows nothing more of tragic conflicts): tragedy dissolves itself into a “self-consciousness” for which, in its “state of spiritual good health and of self-abandonment thereto,” the “thoughts of the Beautiful and the Good” represent themselves no longer as tragically conflicting ethical obligations, but as “comic spectacle” “and [become], on that very account, the sport of private opinion and caprice of any chance individuality.”¹⁷

It is readily apparent that Hegel and Nietzsche provide herewith the tragedy-theoretical pattern for the foundation of the two theoretical positions on modernity mentioned at the beginning. Hegel reads the self-dissolution of tragedy into comedy as the formation of a post-tragic, rational self-consciousness and thus grounds the thesis of the modern overcoming of tragedy in the autonomy of the subject. Nietzsche reads the self-dissolution of tragedy into comedy as the gain of a perspective that is “purely” aesthetic,¹⁸ and thus grounds the thesis of the modern overcoming of tragedy in the transgressive force of play. As differently as they define the result of tragedy, indeed as antipodal as their endeavors in this respect may be, they agree that it *has* an end: that the process of tragedy can be interpreted teleologically. Hegel as well as Nietzsche define the tragedy process in such a way that tragedy appears as the locus of the *sublation* (*Aufhebung*) of the tragic: into aesthetic play or an ethical self-consciousness, beyond the tragic. In both cases, tragedy is an overcoming of the tragic. Without the tragic, however, there can be no tragedy. Therefore, in the teleological reading, the *meaning* of the representation of the tragic in tragedy consists in leading out beyond not only the tragic, but thereby beyond tragedy as well; according to the teleological

reading, tragedy is nothing but its own self-overcoming. All that remains open and therefore debatable in the framework of this reading is whether this self-overcoming has already taken place by now or whether it has yet to happen. In both cases, however, the historical presence of tragedy appears fundamentally transitory. This, once again, is the effect wrought by the teleological interpretation of tragedy upon theories of modernity: because in this interpretation tragedy consists in its own passing away, tragedy has become for us something of the past. Tragedy itself has removed us into a modernity after tragedy.

III. The Strife (*Streit*) of Tragedy

It is in its teleological interpretation of the tragedy process that the romantic conception grounds the thesis of the modern past-ness of tragedy. At the same time, however, this teleological interpretation is problematic even according to the romantic conception's own standard, for it stands in contradiction to its first and absolutely fundamental step in its definition of tragedy according to which tragedy consists in the fundamental difference and tension between the ethical experience of tragically irresolvable conflicts and the aesthetic positing and dissolution of meaning.

In the first variant of the teleological interpretation—Nietzsche's idea of the sublation of the ethically experienced tragic into aesthetic play—this manifests itself in the necessity of interpreting the shift from an ethical to an aesthetic perspective as a definitive replacement. In this view, the ethical perspective does not persist beyond the process of tragedy, but remains behind; it sinks into oblivion. This, however, can be only a contingent (causal) effect of tragedy (which might or might not occur), or else it must be founded on the assertion of a fundamental *superiority in value* of the aesthetic perspective to the ethical one. Such an assertion of the superiority of the aesthetic, for its part, would however be either circular (if it were to argue on aesthetic grounds for the superiority of the aesthetic) or self-contradictory (if it were to argue on ethical grounds for the superiority of the aesthetic).

Things do not look much better for the second variant of the teleological interpretation. It describes the tragedy process—as Hegel does in *The Phenomenology of Mind*—as the sublation of the tragic into a post-tragic ethical “self-consciousness.” This “ethical” sublation of the tragic is supposed to

take place, according to Hegel, in the passage through its aesthetic sublation into the play of comedy. This presupposes that aesthetically experienced play brings about a post-tragic ethical standpoint. Again, this can be understood as a contingent (causal) effect of tragedy (which might or might not occur), or else the aesthetic experience of play must be interpretable as the expression, as the *symbol* of a post-tragic ethical standpoint. To read the aesthetic as the symbol of a post-tragic morality, however, would contradict its conception as play. For as play it is the positing and dissolution of all meaning; as the symbol of a post-tragic self-consciousness, on the other hand, it would have a meaning, and an unambiguous one at that. It thus turns out that both variants of the teleological reading of the tragedy process are based on problematic assumptions about the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic: the first to the extent that it asserts the superiority in value of the aesthetic to the ethical (which cannot be proven in a non-circular manner); the second to the extent that it brings the aesthetic into a symbolic relationship with the ethical (which deprives the aesthetic of its characteristic as play).

This would speak in favour of abandoning the teleological interpretation: tragedy is *not* the sublation of the tragic. This, however, does not entail giving up the definition as such of tragedy as a process: tragedy *is* the dissolution of the ethical experience of the tragic into the aesthetic play of comedy. Nevertheless, sublation (*Aufhebung*) and dissolution (*Auflösung*) of the tragic are not the same thing. More precisely, they are not the same thing when the dissolution of the tragic into play, such as takes place in the tragedy process, is correctly understood. This dissolution is misunderstood when it is taken as a total overcoming, as it is in the teleological interpretation, as the complete replacement of the one perspective by the other. The dissolution of the tragic into play, however, cannot be understood teleologically or as sublation, because it is itself relative, that is, relative with regard to perspective. The dissolution of the tragic into play and thereby of the tragedy into comedy takes place only from the perspective of play; it is only for and from the aesthetic perspective that the tragic dissolves. Furthermore, the ethical perspective—for which the tragic is experienced—can never be completely replaced by the aesthetic perspective for which the tragic is dissolved; instead of being replaced in the process of tragedy, the ethical perspective, and with it the experience of the tragic, *remains*. For this reason, the tragedy process as a whole is not teleologically directed. Rather, an integral part of tragedy's

process-character is the ever-recurring *return* from aesthetic play to the ethical experience of the tragic. When Thomas Bernhard writes, one can “step, from one moment to the next, from the tragedy (in which one finds oneself) into the comedy (in which one finds oneself) and conversely, whenever one wants, from the comedy (in which one finds oneself) into the tragedy (in which one finds oneself),”¹⁹ this movement from “tragedy” to “comedy” and back is but the inner law of the movement of tragedy itself—the definition of its process as a whole. The process in which tragedy consists is not a process in one sense, but rather in a counter-sense: it goes in both directions.

Nietzsche himself draws this same consequence from the inconsistencies of the teleological interpretation, in the fifth book that was added to the second edition of *The Gay Science*. Initially, what concerns Nietzsche are the *aporias* in which the project of a “gay science” became entangled upon his later attempt to realise it in the genealogical investigation of Western morality. For, as a scientifically disposed genealogist, the free spirit finds itself compelled to remove its “fool’s cap” in order to find in the dusty archives what it has long sought. Even worse: in the search for the facts of history, the free spirit loses its gaiety and becomes once again “pious”: a believer of the truth.²⁰ This return of faith and piety, however, also affects the interpretation of tragedy, for it was its very process of self-sublation into the play and laughter of comedy that, in Nietzsche’s teleological interpretation, was supposed to lead to the gay science.

As in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, the starting point of Nietzsche’s interpretation of tragedy is likewise the constitutive connection between the tragic and ethics, between tragic conflicts and ethical obligations. If it is the case that “for the present, we still live in the age of tragedy,” it is because the present is still “the age of moralities and religions,” “of fights over moral valuations,” “of remorse and religious wars.”²¹ Nietzsche’s analysis of “moral valuations” as acts of “faith” forms the basis of this connection between the tragic and ethics. Accordingly, to *believe* in values means to deceive oneself that oneself was the person who posited or created them and consequently the one to make them into values. It is in this forgetfulness of the posited character of values that they take on the appearance of absoluteness. The reason for this self-deception is weakness: the “instinct of weakness” that expresses itself as “demand for certainty,” as “a faith, a support, backbone, something

to fall back on."²² At the same time it is this absoluteness that is ascribed out of weakness to values, as something certain and believed, that entangles them in tragic, irresolvable conflicts. Conversely, their tragic conflicts dissolve when—and *only* when—the belief (that stems from weakness) in “certain” values, in valid ethical demands and obligations, dissolves. This succeeds when we learn to see ourselves as an “aesthetic phenomenon,” and this success is best secured with the help of art. Through art (and for this we owe it our gratitude) we can “look . . . upon, look . . . *down* upon ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laugh . . . *over* ourselves or weep . . . *over* ourselves”: “we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art lest we lose that *freedom above things* that our ideal demands of us.”²³ This is “a *freedom of the will* that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty”;²⁴ the freedom of playful distanciation and liquefaction of all values, obligations, demands which out of weakness had been held to be certain—their “parody,” as Nietzsche says here, too, in which their tragic conflicts dissolve.

In the first books of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche also describes this aesthetic escape from the tragic world of ethical obligations as a process of ‘recuperation’ which takes place through tragedy, to the extent that it is more than a mere representation of the tragic, to the extent that it is *art* and consequently its own parody or comedy. This is, once again, the teleological interpretation of the tragedy process. Now, in the fifth book, Nietzsche sees this aesthetic recuperation from the tragic illness as being constantly threatened by, as he had already said before, the danger of an ethical “relapse.”²⁵ The (self-) overcoming of tragedy is unstable: time and again, we fall back into the belief in ethical obligations and consequently into tragic conflict and failure. This is the insight with which Nietzsche—speaking in the guise of the “cautious friend of man”—confronts the proclamation of an irrevocably attained state of good health. The “great health” of an aesthetic freedom beyond the tragic is, rather, “a health—that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up.”²⁶ There is no aesthetic recuperation that is not interrupted and postponed “again and again” by ethical relapses; there is accordingly no aesthetic play without the recurrence of tragic conflicts. This revaluation of tragedy displaces the entire structure of Nietzsche’s interpretation of modernity. It still holds that “our age” is no *longer* the “brief” age of the tragic, the “age

of moralities” and “religious wars.” But at the same time it can be said of our age that it is not *yet* the “eternal” age of comedy, into whose laughter tragedy will have dissolved. Our age, rather, is the age in between, between the tragic and comedy, the intermediary age with its “new law of ebb and flood,”²⁷ of the coming *and going* of the aesthetic freedom of play, of the overcoming *and return* of the belief in moral valuations and their irresolvable tragic conflicts.

With this relapse thesis, Nietzsche corrects the teleological interpretation of the tragedy process—and thereby his *own* assertion as well of the sublation of ethical-tragic seriousness into play. For it is through the relapse thesis that tragedy is revealed as the locus of two movements that cross and conflict with one another: from the ethical-tragic experience *to* aesthetic play—and back again. This counter-sense means that the process in which tragedy consists is not that of sublation, but rather that of strife. In its character as process, tragedy is not teleological, but agonal. This, however, is not the strife that defines its tragic character—the strife between different ethical obligations or demands—but rather that between the tragic and its other, the aesthetic play of comedy. Tragedy is irreducible to tragic strife; it is not at all the case, as Heidegger contended, that in tragedy “nothing is staged or displayed theatrically, but the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought.”²⁸ Tragedy *is* performance and thus never a mere carrying-out of tragic strife. That it is the performance of the tragic strife does not mean, however, that it is its sublation. The strife in which tragedy engages is one of the second degree: a strife *with* the tragic strife. This strife with the tragic strife, in which tragedy consists, is itself not tragic (any longer). But it is not (yet) playful either, let alone comic. The strife with the tragic strife in which tragedy consists lies beyond (or between) the tragic and play. Consequently, tragedy “itself”—in its strife—is neither aesthetic nor ethical; the strife of tragedy belongs neither to ethical nor to aesthetic experience. Tragedy, rather, is the strife *between* ethical and aesthetic experience.

IV. Tragic Irony

In the fifth book of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche arrives at the strife model of tragedy, which shakes the foundation, grounded in theories of tragedy, of the denial, attempted by theories of modernity, of the presence of tragedy. Tragedy is not—as the romantic conception in its teleological interpretation saw it—

the process of its self-overcoming into comedy, but rather the process between the tragic *and* comedy. Tragedy recovers time and again from its relapse into comedy. The passing of tragedy is endless, and for this reason it will never be past.

In order for the theoretical consequences of this agonal model of tragedy to be properly assessed, the strife between the ethically tragic and aesthetic play, that is, the strife that constitutes tragedy, must be characterised more precisely. This strife cannot be thought of as their mere opposition, for it possesses at the same time a disclosive power as well. The relationship developed in tragedy between aesthetic and ethical experience is as an agonal relationship mutually transformative; indeed, even productive. That, and above all, *how* the ethical experience in tragedy is an experience of the tragic and the aesthetic experience in tragedy is an experience of the comic or the play: that both exist only through their agonal relationship in tragedy. The specific *significance* of the tragic experience just like of the playful experience that we make in tragedy can only be correctly grasped if both these experiences are understood as a result of the dispute between ethical and aesthetic perspectives.

I would like to examine primarily one aspect of this disclosive power of the strife in tragedy: the aspect in which the aesthetic experience of play, instead of sublating the ethical experience of the tragic, brings forth the latter by giving it a form which is specific to tragedy. The process by which this comes to pass is elucidated in the other text to which I referred above in my reconstruction of the romantic conception of tragedy, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. The figure Hegel uses in this regard is that of tragic irony. It represents the key to an appropriate understanding of the relationship between the (ethically experienced) tragic and (aesthetically experienced) play—and thereby the key to an appropriate grasp of the concept of tragedy. It sets out to explain how tragedy might fulfill the demand “that the highest tragedy must be brought about through a particular type of jest.”²⁹ This “particular type of jest” that brings about “the highest tragedy” is tragic irony.

In order to understand this claim, a more precise definition of the aesthetic is necessary than the one I have used up until now in the rather loose concept of “play.” Such a definition can be attained if we try to apprehend the character of self-reflection inherent in aesthetic play. In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel described this self-reflection of the aesthetic, following closely

thereby formulations used by Fichte, Schiller, and Schlegel, as that of “speaking.”³⁰ For Hegel, all art is “language” and as such divorced from “actual doing”; this is true of both basic forms being investigated here by Hegel, epos and tragedy. At the same time, however, tragedy represents a “higher language” than does the epos, because it is not “the organ disappearing into its content,” but lets the act of speaking appear as such. The language of the epos is representational; it is determined by *what* it says. The language of tragedy, on the other hand, is “higher” or “superior” because it is self-reflexive. In this language that which is spoken appears as being brought forth by speaking; the speech of tragedy does not represent contents or positions, but rather makes them. The language of tragedy is self-reflexive, because in it the activity of speaking becomes visible (or audible)—the “*activity* by means of which the mind brings forth itself as object.”

Moreover, tragedy is a specific manner of the reflexive emergence of the constructedness of its contents and positions, a manner that Hegel outlined in the figure of tragic irony, indirectly and without using this term, in the chapter “The Ethical World.” Hegel’s text of reference here is, of course, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*.³¹ Here, the hero’s speech and action appears as “something in which a conscious element is bound up with what is unconscious, what is peculiarly one’s own with what is alien and external: it is an essential reality divided in sunder, whose other aspect consciousness experiences and also finds to be its own aspect, but as a power violated by its doing, and roused to hostility against it.”³² In tragedy, we experience the tragic hero’s action and speech in such a way that it “keeps concealed within itself this other alien aspect to clear knowledge [of the hero].”³³ And this means: we experience it in such a way that the hero’s action and speech already contain his other that stands opposite him in conflict. Indeed, we experience it even in such a way that his action and speech *posit*, from out of and through themselves, the other that stands opposite them in conflict; that it is the one speech and action that brings forth the other or alien speech and action that struggle against them. This is tragic, for the hero is battered to pieces by that other; and this is ironic, for what batters the hero to pieces is produced by himself.

Tragic irony is formally characterised thereby as a figure of reflection, a reflection whose mechanism is aesthetic and whose effect is ethical. The *ethical effect* of this reflection consists in a change to the way we view ethical conflicts. In

ordinary action, the two positions of an ethical or political conflict appear to us as merely externally opposed to one another. "In the case of action," Hegel writes, "only one phase of the decision is in general in evidence":³⁴ that phase that constitutes the apparent content of the decision that sets itself in opposition to another. On this surface the conflicting positions are what they *say* to one another, and this opposition of what they say is governed by the simple rules of logic: opposing one another, they exclude one another. Thus, the two sides of the conflict appear to one another merely as the "negative," "other," "alien."

It is this simple or "logical" understanding of practical conflicts that is fundamentally changed by the figure of tragic irony, for this figure situates the conflict of one position with the other into the position itself. In this function, the figure of tragic irony rests upon the *mechanism of aesthetic reflection*. Aesthetic reflection, as we have seen, consists in the return of what is said—contents or positions—to the activity of its speaking. This reveals *how* positions are "made" in speaking. Thus to experience the tragic irony of one position is to experience how it is made: namely, in such a way that this position can only make or assert itself by at once making or asserting that which opposes it. And this co-positing of that which opposes it is not external to this position; on the contrary, its self-assertion can only succeed when it brings forth the counterforce through which it fails. By disclosing this, the figure of tragic irony gives the conflict with the counter position a locus other than the external one of a relationship of logical exclusion between manifest contents. In the figure of tragic irony it becomes evident that into the one position the conflict with the other is already inscribed through the manner of its constructedness; its conflict with the other is that which constitutes it. The figure of tragic irony interiorises the conflict between positions and reveals thereby its tragic character: as a conflict they cannot resolve, for that would entail their self-dissolution.³⁵

Hence, in this interiorisation, the tragic character of conflicts disclosed by the figure of tragic irony is no longer the tragic in the sense that underlies the romantic as well as the mythic paradigm. In this sense, the tragic is defined by externality. Human conflicts become tragic when they are animated by forces greater than human: when divine powers impose upon the two sides an "equilibrium" (Hölderlin) that we humans are incapable of upsetting, for in it there lies on both sides a weight, a divine weight, that is too much for

our merely human powers.³⁶ By contrast, the figure of tragic irony uncouples the concept of the tragic from this prerequisite and gives it a new, wholly immanent sense: conflicts are tragically irresolvable not because the positions in them are determined by a “*force exterieure*” (Barthes), but because the very opposite is the case: because that which seems to oppose them as a mere external force is in truth that which constitutes their innermost being. The figure of tragic irony circumscribes thereby a form of the tragic that has left behind the traditional coupling of tragic hero and divine intervention, of tragic conflicts and the struggle of the gods, in general: of tragic and destiny. In other words, the figure of tragic irony circumscribes a genuinely modern concept of the tragic.

In this very sense, the sense established by the figure of tragic irony, the conflict at the centre of Beckett’s *End Game* is a tragic conflict.³⁷ For the relationship between the two characters Hamm and Clov, that of master and servant, is at once one of opposition and of mutual dependence. Their game with one another is an end game for the very reason that it can never end: because Hamm cannot stop and Clov cannot leave. This would presuppose that they could exist at all outside of their relationship to one another. Each of them, however, is nothing outside of his conflict with the other; indeed, each of them *is* his conflict with the other. For the two of them “make” themselves by battling each other; each consists in opposing the other and that means that each consists in opposing himself. This can be seen on the most elemental level in the manner in which they speak. Hamm speaks as the eminent author, whose eminence rests solely in the suppression of the obstinate language material upon which he depends at the same time and which Clov makes use of in his word games. Conversely, Clov speaks as a subversive jester, whose subversions consist in undermining the narrative constellations of meaning upon which he depends at the same time and which Hamm tries to work out in his “novel.” Each is constituted, in reversed, mirror-image fashion, by the struggle against—the domination or the subversion of—the other. In other words, each is constituted by that which he struggles against—and by that which struggles against him. For this reason, they can neither separate nor become reconciled. They cannot separate because each is what he is only through his relationship to the other. They cannot become reconciled because the other, through which alone each is what he is, is the one struggling against him. It is because it develops this conflict that Beckett’s *End Game* can be

called a tragedy. For if we designate as “tragedies” such plays in which tragic conflicts are disclosed, or more precisely, in which conflicts are disclosed to be tragic, and if the reflexive figure of tragic irony, which discloses the conflicts between positions in these positions themselves, represents a figure essential to such disclosure of tragic conflicts, then Beckett’s *End Game* is not only one, but perhaps *the* example of a present-day, modern tragedy.

V. The Tragedy of Reflection

In the preceding sections, I have examined the romantic claim that tragedy consists of the process of its self-dissolution and self-overcoming into a post-tragic condition; this would be the condition of modernity. As I have tried to show with reference to Nietzsche and Hegel, this romantic claim is undermined by the very attempt to substantiate it; the romantic theory of tragedy fails. If at the same time, however, in the romantic paradigm—as I asserted at the beginning—the theory of tragedy grounds the theory of modernity as post-tragic condition, what consequences, then, does this failure of the romantic theory of tragedy have for a theory of modernity? In conclusion thereto some preliminary remarks.

The crucial concept for any answer to this question is the one at the centre of Hegel’s figure of tragic irony: the concept of reflection. This concept also lies at the heart of the romantic understanding of modernity as the time after tragedy. Autonomous subjectivity and transgressive play, the two central conceptions in the romantic theory of modernity, are two different instances of reflection. Thereby both these figures, however, are party to the same fundamental understanding of reflection as a medium of distancing any pre-given determination. According to the romantic idea of reflection determinations, by being reflected, undergo a fundamental change of their status: rather than being (pre-)given, they are constituted—be it as results of the autonomously performed deeds of a subject, be it as effects of the anonymous process of a playful performance. With this, tragic conflicts become impossible. For the minimum condition for calling a conflict “tragic” is its irresolvability. Irresolvability of the conflictual relation, however, presupposes the irresolvability, that is, the pre-given and unchangeable determination of the elements related. According to its romantic reading, the (subjective or playful) reflection dissolves all pre-given determinations and thereby makes

its tragic conflict essentially impossible. This romantic reading of reflexivity is contradicted by the conception of reflexivity as embodied by the Hegelian figure of tragic irony. It leads to an alternative understanding of the modern principle of reflexivity.

At first, the figure of tragic irony seems a figure of reflection in the romantic sense: it is a figure of reflection since it presents a position in its process of producing. According to its romantic reading, this reflexive presentation of a position in its process of producing entails the *dissolution* of any pre-given and potentially conflictual determinations. The Hegelian figure of tragic irony rejects this optimistic equation, for here the reflexive presentation of a position in its process of producing does not lead to the dissolution but to the *disclosure* of irresolvable conflicts. For in the figure of tragic irony it shows that a position is produced by its conflict with its other. That is established in the different ways in which the romantic conception and the figure of tragic irony understand the relationship between reflection and determination. The romantic conception understands reflection as infinite; it can transform every pre-given determination into something self-made or self-set (*Selbstgesetztes*). The figure of tragic irony, instead, offers a different view on reflection. In this view, reflection is finite. And to be finite means to stand under conditions that are pre-given. Those conditions form the “facticity” of finite beings. The structure of such (“factual” or) factual conditions are distinctions. Thus, to view reflection as finite means to view reflection as performed under the condition of factual distinctions, which, since they have not been constituted by reflection, are also indissoluble by reflection.³⁸

This holds for both dimensions of the experience of tragedy, the ethical and the aesthetic. Both are forms of reflection and both are determined by factual distinctions, although in different ways. Aesthetic reflection is *externally delimited* by its distinction from ethical reflection; since this distinction makes aesthetic reflection possible, it cannot be dissolved in it. I take this to be the insight of Nietzsche’s theory of “relapse” as described before: contrary to the romantic idea of transgressive play, there cannot be a definite establishment of a purely aesthetic perspective (for which there are no conflicts but only play, no tragedy but only comedy), for we will always fall back in its other, the ethical perspective. Ethical reflection, on the other side, is *internally frag-*

mented by distinctions of fundamental values, which, in their irreducible heterogeneity, stand in a potentially conflictual relation. I take this to be the insight of Hegel's theory of tragic irony: contrary to the romantic idea of autonomous subjectivity, there cannot be a "lexical" order of priority between the fundamental values which direct our ethical reasoning and acting since the logic of their relation is at once one of mutual presupposition and exclusion.

All this requires further explanation.³⁹ Here, however, I just want to indicate the general consequence of this argument of the finitude of reflection for the relation between modernity and tragedy. For we are now in a position to spell out the different, even opposed conceptions of modernity that follow from either denying or maintaining the presence of tragedy. To deny the presence of tragedy presupposes understanding modern reflexivity as dissolving the facticity of pre-given distinctions: be it in the form of a transgressive aesthetic play that dissolves its difference from the ethical perspective, or in the form of a rationally autonomous subject that dissolves the conflictual distinctions between fundamental values. Whereas to maintain the presence of tragedy implies understanding modern reflexivity as operating under the condition of factually pre-given distinctions. For such factual constraint (*and* condition) of reflexivity makes tragedy both necessary and possible. It makes tragedy necessary—for ethical reflection, when factually constrained and conditioned, time and again entangles itself in irresolvable tragic conflicts (which need to be represented by tragedy). And it makes tragedy possible—for aesthetic reflection, when factually constrained and conditioned, time and again relapses into an ethical experience of tragic conflicts. Modern reflexivity does not overcome tragedy but repeats or re-constitutes it in a new form. This defines the presence of tragedy in modernity: as the tragedy of reflection.

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Notes

* I have presented the following theses on several occasions in Frankfurt am Main, Johns Hopkins, Essen, Cambridge (England), Yale, and Amsterdam. I have benefited

from criticism and remarks among others by Karin de Boer, Andrew Bowie, Alexander García Düttmann, Werner Hamacher, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Bettine Menke, Peter Osborne, Henry Pickford, Robert Pippin, Hent de Vries, David Wellbery, and Albrecht Wellmer.

- ¹ G.W.F. Hegel, from *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 11. On some problems of interpretation of Hegel's thesis of the end of art, see my "The Dissolution of Beauty: Hegel on Drama," *L'Esprit créateur*, Special Issue, *Beyond Aesthetics*, ed. Rodolphe Gasché, vol. XXXV, no. 3, Fall, 1995, p. 19 ff.
- ² Friedrich Schlegel, *Studienausgabe*, eds. E. Behler and H. Eichner, Schöningh, Paderborn, 1988, vol. 5, p. 189.
- ³ This general proposal should be qualified: it is true only of the *German* tradition of a philosophical discourse of modernity. At the same time, however, there is a "philosophical discourse on modernity" in the true sense, that is, a philosophical discourse in the centre of which lies the problem of modernity itself, only in the tradition of historical-philosophical thought that has its roots in the German reaction to Enlightenment and found a first systematic completion in German Idealism. For this tradition, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, chapter 1, 1987.
- ⁴ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," trans. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *German Essays on Science in the 20th Century*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher, New York, Continuum, 1996, pp. 236-37.
- ⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 187.
- ⁶ The mythical paradigm of the reflection on tragedy and modernity finds no continuation in the present discussion. Even where, in the context of practical philosophy, classical tragedy has been rediscovered as a form of articulation of a valid ethical experience, this expressly no longer happens with the claim of the mythical paradigm on an ending and overcoming of the situation of modernity; cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness, Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993. I cannot explicitly embark on the difference between these ethical forms of the representation of tragedy and those that I attempt in the following; it has to do decisively with the relation between the ethical and the aesthetic in tragedy. For some reasons behind a rejection of the mythical paradigm, cf. Ch. Menke, *Tragödie im Sittlichen: Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit nach Hegel*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996, p. 19 *et seq.*
- ⁷ I will explain this in closer detail focusing on the two central authors of the romantic paradigm: Hegel (section IV) and Nietzsche (section III).
- ⁸ Vernunft ist "als die schlechthin unendliche Kraft anzuerkennen, welcher kein

Objekt . . . Widerstand leisten" könnte; G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, Bd. 2, S. 551.

- ⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufman, New York, Vintage, 1967, sect. 5, p. 52. On the concept of aesthetic play, cf. sect. 22, p. 132 ff.
- ¹⁰ This contrast can be most starkly seen between Critical Theory (Habermas) and certain types of post-structuralism.
- ¹¹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, sect. 11, p. 76.
- ¹² Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978 (1st edition 1941).
- ¹³ See viz. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, N.J., 1983, p. 54 ff. (Problema I: "Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical").
- ¹⁴ For a detailed explanation of this concept of the 'aesthetic' see Ch. Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1998, p. 29 ff.
- ¹⁵ V. Nabokov, "The Tragedy of Tragedy," *The Man From the USSR and Other Plays*, ed. D. Nabokov, San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.
- ¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York, Vintage-Random House, 1974, no. 1 (numerical references for this work refer to sections). The same figure is already at the basis of Nietzsche's earlier concept in *The Birth of Tragedy*: already here, tragedy itself is understood as the process that leads us from ("tragic") suffering to "joy involved in the annihilation of the individual," *The Birth of Tragedy*, sect. 16, p. 104. And likewise, already here, this process is understood, in the sense of the romantic paradigm, as one, in which the art of tragedy reveals itself as "comedy of art," sect. 5, p. 52. Moreover, the early Nietzsche understands the logic of this transformation romantically, namely as one of (self-) reflection, "for in this state [that is, the aesthetic state] he [that is, the spectator] is, in a marvellous manner, like the weird image of the fairy tale which can turn its eyes at will and behold itself; he is at once subject and object, at once poet, actor and spectator," sect. 5, p. 52.
- ¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, trans. J.B. Baillie, *Phenomenology of Mind*, New York, Harper and Row, 1967, pp. 747-49.
- ¹⁸ "If you would explain the tragic myth, the first requirement is to seek the pleasure that is peculiar to it in the *purely aesthetic sphere*, without transgressing into the region of pity, fear, or the morally sublime." *The Birth of Tragedy*, sect. 24, p. 141, [my emphasis].
- ¹⁹ Thomas Bernhard, *Watten. Ein Nachlass*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1978, p. 87. Quoted from B. Theisen, "Comitragedies: Thomas Bernhard's Marionette Theater," *Modern Language Notes*, 111, 1996, p. 533 ff. Theisen makes use of Luhmann's observation theory to undertake an impressive reformulation of the romantic

conception of tragedy. The decisive point, however, remains unclarified: the relationship to the teleological interpretation of the tragedy process and thus to the question of the modern presence of tragedy.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, no. 344.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 347.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 347.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 382. It is also a critique of the idea of a post-Christian condition of complete overcoming of all religious-metaphysical ruptures and estrangements as found in Feuerbach and Heine: "One day, when humanity has regained its full health, when peace between body and soul has been reinstated and when they have again pervaded one another in original harmony, then one will barely be able to grasp the artificial discord that Christianity has established between the two." ("Einst, wenn die Menschheit ihre völlige Gesundheit wiedererlangt, wenn der Friede zwischen Leib und Seele wiederhergestellt und sie wieder in ursprünglicher Harmonie sich durchdringen, dann wird man den künstlichen Hader, den das Christentum zwischen beiden gestiftet, kaum begreifen können.") Heinrich Heine, "Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland," ed. Hans Mayer, *Beiträge zur deutschen Ideologie*, FfM-Berlin-Wien, Ullstein, 1971, p. 13.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, no. 1.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Alfred Hofstadter, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell, San Francisco, California, Harper San Francisco, 1993, p. 168 *et seq.* See also the critique in Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Métaphrasis; suivi de Le théâtre de Hölderlin*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

²⁹ This statement of E.T.A. Hoffmann's is quoted in K.S. Guthke, *Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre*, New York, Random House, 1966. Guthke's study provides a useful overview, but his attempt to apprehend the specifically modern relationship between tragedy and comedy fails; not least for methodological reasons, for he frames the question of tragedy, comedy and their 'synthesis' in tragicomedy as one of *Weltanschauung* and not of modes of representation, that is, he approaches it ideologically, not rhetorically.

³⁰ For the following, cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 732 *ff.* For a more detailed discussion, see Christoph Menke, *Tragödie im Sittlichen*, p. 53 *ff.*

³¹ On the subject of irony in *Oedipus Rex*, see Jean-Pierre Vernant's analysis in Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1988—and its reformulation in Hans Thies

Lehmann, *Theater und Mythos. Die Konstitution des Subjekts im Diskurs der antiken Tragödie*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1991.

³² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 490.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

³⁵ If this interpretation of tragic irony is right; and if this is a right interpretation of the interpretation that Hegel gives of tragic irony, then that has the consequence that the relationship of the tragic and irony (and consequentially also the relationship of the tragic and the comic) in Hegel can also *not* be understood any more as the seed of a somehow assumed 'overcoming' of tragedy. This thesis thus is in direct opposition to the readings of Hegel given by Rodolphe Gasché and Werner Hamacher; cf. Rodolphe Gasché, "Self-dissolving Seriousness: On the Comic in the Hegelian Conception of Tragedy," eds. Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks, *Philosophy and Tragedy*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 38 ff; Werner Hamacher, "(Das Ende der Kunst mit der Maske)," ed. Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Sprachen der Ironie, Sprachen des Ernstes*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2000, p. 121 ff.

³⁶ This 'externalistic' explanation of the tragic is widespread; it underlies the opposition between modernity and tragedy, which is the common ground of the romantic and the mythical paradigm. A recent example is Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1963, p. 142: "Car le dieux sont la détermination même du tragique: pour jouer tragique, il faut et il suffit de faire comme si les dieux existaient, comme si on les avait vus, comme s'ils avaient parlé: mais alors quelle distance de soi-même à ce que l'on dit." The English translation—*On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1964—omits the clause "Car le dieux . . . tragique:"; "And, thereby, the tragedy was instituted at last: to perform tragedy, it is necessary and sufficient to act as if the gods existed, as if one had seen them, as if they had spoken: but then what a distance from oneself to what one says!"

³⁷ I have shown this in greater detail in Christoph Menke, "Der Stand des Streits. Literatur und Gesellschaft in Samuel Becketts *Endspiel*"; ed. Hans-Dieter König, *Neue Versuche, Becketts Endspiel zu verstehen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996, p. 63 ff.

³⁸ The existence of tragic conflicts does not yet follow on from the existence of factual conditions of reflection. The existence of tragic conflicts cannot be deduced at all logically, but rather requires a social and cultural diagnosis. Facticity is consequentially a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the tragic.

³⁹ On the conflicts of ethical reflection, see my *Tragödie im Sittlichen*, chapter 6.

Max Pensky

Natural History: the Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno

ABSTRACT

Theodor Adorno's concept of 'natural history' [Naturgeschichte] was central for a number of Adorno's theoretical projects, but remains elusive. In this essay, I analyse different dimensions of the concept of natural history, distinguishing amongst (a) a reflection on the normative and methodological bases of philosophical anthropology and critical social science; (b) a conception of critical memory oriented toward the preservation of the memory of historical suffering; and (c) the notion of 'mindfulness of nature in the subject' provocatively asserted in Max Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These strands are united by the notion of transience and goal of developing a critical theory sensitive to the transient in history. The essay concludes by suggesting some implications of an expanded concept of natural history for issues in the discourse theory of Jürgen Habermas.

KEYWORDS: Natural History, Adorno, Critical Theory, Memory, Habermas

The concept of 'natural history' [Naturgeschichte] is surely a candidate for the most troubling and most resistant theoretical element of Theodor W. Adorno's intellectual legacy for contemporary Critical Theory. On one level, the extreme difficulties involved in assessing the content and relevance of this

concept are interior to the work of Adorno itself: developed very early in his career, the concept of natural history plays a crucial and, typically enough, often subterranean role in virtually all of Adorno's work, from the *Kantgesellschaft* lecture "On the Idea of Natural History" that Adorno delivered in 1932, through to the negative philosophical anthropology of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, to the natural history 'model' and the destruction of the Hegelian vision of World Spirit in the *Negative Dialectics*. This wealth of theoretical formulations, clues, sketches, and outlines indicates that the concept of natural history is among the most persistent and influential theoretical structures in Adorno's work, rivalling (of course related intimately to) the concept of the dialectic itself.

A reception of Adorno's concept of natural history also questions the relation between the 'classical' Critical Theory of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse, and the transformation (and large-scale rejection) of the foundations of classical Critical Theory by Habermas from the late 1960s to the present. As we assess the meaning and significance of Adorno's concept of natural history, we are (if we are to do more than intellectual history) also assessing the sorts of intractable theoretical rifts that separate Adorno's projects and failures from the grand transformation that took place with the introduction of the discourse-theoretical paradigm in critical social theory. And any assessment of the contemporary relevance of the concept of natural history must refer to contemporary debates on the future of Habermasian discourse theory; its specific benefits and disadvantages, and whether the latter can be supplemented by intellectual resources from out of the same tradition of Critical Theory. The present reading of natural history, then, is an effort to promote a more creative and pragmatic dialogue between discourse theory and classic or first-generation Critical Theory, and assumes that such a dialogue is not just a matter of hermeneutic interest.

Adorno's conception of natural history will predictably resist encapsulation and easy definition; as a *concept* (more on this in a moment) it performs, rather than simply denotes, a set of tense relationships between opposed alternatives. Natural history encompasses: (a) the overall project of a negative dialectics, with its goal of discovering the elements of a critical social theory from within the very centre of the conceptual structure of idealist

philosophical texts; (b) the demand for a non-systematic philosophy that would embrace the principle of the historical or textual fragment both in its form and its application; (c) the tangled and claustrophobic conceptual mirror-play of Adorno's later philosophical exegeses, culminating in *Negative Dialectics*, which sought to wring a faint sense of some utopian residue lying outside of conceptual thought, through the most extreme performance of conceptual self-scrutiny. Under certain presuppositions about the tenor of Adorno's later work, *Naturgeschichte* certainly also implies; (d) a pervasive and ultimately paralysing sense of dread and helplessness in the face of a homogeneous and virtually irresistible history of domination, and a corollary sense of capitulation at the vision of world history as continuous catastrophe; and, (e) the most distinctive but perhaps least remarked-on aspect of Adorno's thinking, that is, his singular ability to endow even the most abstract of his subjects with an emotional charge, an affective dimension of feeling (of sadness, or disappointment, or yearning, or some synthesis of these three for which there is no precise name) that renders virtually all of his texts 'subjective' even when methodological objectivity would have been most demanded, and contributes, in large measure, to that quality of Adorno's own work that he described as the inner resistance to 'summarisation'; a quality that now, a quarter century after his death, also appears as the difficulty in contemporary appropriations of the methodological innovations and critical strategies that might still offer powerful challenges and resources to contemporary problems in the critical theory of society.

After a brief reading of the concept of natural history in Adorno's early eponymous essay: (I) I will try to distinguish the different valences of the concept of natural history, levels that we need to analyse separately if we are to see how the concept operates on the level of methodology; (II) I will then propose that, if we distinguish these levels, we will see that what Adorno has in mind with the concept of natural history is in effect a kind of strategy for the synthesis of methodological and normative considerations; a formal challenge to the question of methodological objectivity in philosophy and the social sciences, on the one hand, and existential-phenomenological versions of temporality and historicity on the other. I will describe natural history as the research protocol for the social scientific encounter with historical contingency: a research protocol that Adorno himself never ultimately fulfilled.

In a concluding section, (III) I will try to apply these conclusions to the state of contemporary (Habermasian) critical theory, arguing that in questions of the relation between normative theory and philosophical anthropology and in the discourse—theoretical evacuation of conceptions of memory—Adorno's concept of natural history presents both a formidable criticism and important intellectual resources.

I

I turn first to the 1932 essay, "The Idea of Natural History," in which the context of discussion is the age-old quarrel concerning the relation of historical experience and historical knowledge to a supposedly eternalised ahistorical essence; the more immediate context is the success of Heidegger's attempts to overcome this dualism by describing the essence of *Dasein* as itself historicity. The idea of natural history is introduced as a critique and corrective of the perspective of *Being and Time*. Adorno's main purpose, initially, is a dialectical one: he wants to demonstrate that the concepts of 'nature' and 'history' cannot be regarded as ontological essences without idealising them and rendering them into mythical self-parodies. History and nature are concepts that mutually and dialectically define one another, and can 'flip' into their other at the moment of their most extreme conceptual formulation. Nature, conceived initially and statically as that which lies beyond thought and resists it as origin and ground, appears as timeless, that is, under the idea of mythical repetition, blind fate, and unthinkability, just as history, cut from the idea of nature as a wholly human process of self-constitution, appears as ceaseless innovation and the production of the new.

Both of these perspectives are of course untenable, and Adorno's suggestion here is to ask what happens—what *perspective* emerges—if one is able to allow each concept to develop, in its extreme formulation, to its other. "If the question of the relation of nature and history is to be seriously posed," writes Adorno,

then it only offers any chance of solution if it is possible to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature.¹

The idea of natural history, then, is first formulated as a methodological suggestion for a new form of critical historiography that will no longer be beholden to the traditional idealistic versions of timeless nature and historical progress, but will question the very terms of historical research by proposing to investigate precisely that region where historical events, by virtue of their very nature as time-bound and singular—as objects of a critical memory—come to appear as the operations of nature, while nature itself, in turn, is criticised as a figure of timelessness only insofar as it is linked to the social practices and rational inquiries of humans.

It is not just the purely intellectual, dialectical activity of de-familiarising these two terms that interests Adorno. He is also trying to describe the peculiar *productivity* that occurs as a consequence of this process. Nature and history, de-familiarised, coalesce into natural history, which is something very different, a perspective that Adorno explicates with references to the pre-Marxist works of Lukács (*Theory of the Novel*) and Benjamin (*Origin of the German Mourning-Play*). One way of expressing this is to resort to a traditional language of epistemology: nature and history are concepts and as such refer to a range of human practices of the organisation of otherwise disparate sets of empirical experiences. If dialectically fused into their 'zero point' of indifference, however, these two concepts generate an idea, which is a modality of concept with no correlate in any given experience, and in fact, according to an epistemological claim borrowed from the preface of Benjamin's book on baroque drama, also, *contra* Kant, has no regulatory function for the acquisition of new experience either. On the contrary, it appears 'idea' here synthesises dialectically opposed concepts in such a way that, while remaining a sub-species of concept, it has the opposite function of *disintegrating* or de-organising what is given (or what wants to be given) in experience.² The idea of natural history realises its truth-content through its capacity to *degrade* or disrupt the appearance of what is 'given' in experience, insofar as what is given is in itself a reflection of a false totalisation of the ensemble of social and material conditions specific to a given socio-economic constellation. In a departure from this parasitic use of the traditional language of epistemology, however, and an (equally parasitic) use of the language of phenomenology, Adorno will conclude that the idea of natural history amounts to a degradation of experience as a perspective, or a *way of seeing*.

Adorno contends that the dialectical crossing-point of nature and history constructs a particular optics. Natural history, for Adorno, is the attempt to combine Lukács' notion of 'second nature' with Benjamin's conception of the 'allegorical way of seeing'. In Lukács, Adorno finds the vocabulary to describe history turned nature; that is, human products and creations of human history which no longer appear to be so, but rather, bereft of their integral relation to a world of human meaning, appear paradoxically as artificially natural: what Lukács calls 'the world of convention' is the world of de-valued or no longer 'criticisable' tradition. Discrete elements of a devalued lifeworld do not simply vanish, but linger, frozen, in the form of fragments. Second nature in this sense is a world in which the products of social action have congealed into a law-like but dead and meaningless mass of codes, practices, institutions and objects, a world of "estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers."³ In other words, the *reified* world of intersubjective interaction takes on the appearance of nature insofar as it no longer exhibits the characteristic features of a collective creation; insofar as its genesis narrative is no longer re-constructible. Already we can see that this early notion of 'second nature' suggests the idea of a lifeworld whose processes of symbolic reproduction of meaning has gone horribly awry; a lifeworld which, from the perspective of its participants, does not seem to be reproducing itself at all, or seems to do so only behind their backs according to mechanisms that are opaque, and generating meanings that can only be guessed at due to their complexity and their lack of public accessibility.

Again, what Adorno emphatically has in mind here, far more than any substantive critical reading of the pathological side of disenchanting lifeworlds, is the singular "methodological proposal" (as Fredric Jameson names it)⁴ that such pathologies will remain closed off to critical investigation until the critic is able to bring about a *change of perspective*, and it is this changed perspective that Adorno ultimately means by the concept of natural history. The vision of a social world that has died, and whose fragmented form nevertheless continues to radiate obscure meanings in the form of cipher-like and riddling configurations of discrete empirical elements, is intended as a sort of methodological *shock*: "If I should succeed at giving you a notion of the idea of natural history," Adorno writes, "you would first of all have to experience something of the $\Theta\alpha\nu\mu\alpha\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$, [shock] that this question portends. Natural

history is not a synthesis of natural and historical methods, but a change of perspective.”⁵

Second nature, then, what Lukács described as “a petrified estranged complex of meaning that is no longer able to awaken inwardness; . . . a charnel house of rotted interiorities,”⁶ provides the optics for a critical challenge: to *interpret* the world of shattered relationships (between subjects and nature no less than between subjects and one another) in order to uncover its characteristic pathologies and cloaking techniques. Where the early Lukács saw the call for a metaphysical-romantic quest for personal reawakening, Adorno is after a method for social criticism. And in this crucial turn from the subject to the objects of reification, Adorno turns to Benjamin’s notion of the ‘allegorical vision’ to supplement Lukács.

Adorno’s transformation of Benjamin’s notion of the historical essence of baroque allegory would be a very large topic in itself, and has already been discussed in great detail.⁷ Here, rather than go over much old ground, I will merely recall that, from Benjamin, Adorno is most interested in the notion of natural history as the crossing point of physical matter and the production of meaning. Benjamin read the baroque allegorists as beholding nature itself as essentially historical. From the theological perspective of fallen nature the baroque regarded material objects themselves as containing within their very finitude, monadologically as it were, the compacted moral-religious history of the world, which is to say that they—the objects of physical nature—appear as allegories of transience [*Vergänglichkeit*]. And, conversely, human history is transmuted in this ‘allegorical way of seeing’ as the spectacle of the progressive revelation of the natural, that is, the corporeal kernel of each and every human effort to construct meaning in history: the corporeal is equated with the mortal, which is once again transience. History is translated to the spectacle of dead and dying nature, to ruin, collapse, vain hopes, unsuccessful plans, and the repeated depiction of the expiring creature.⁸ As the Benjamin scholar Beatrice Hanssen has written, ‘natural history’ thus aims, ultimately, at refuting the claim toward memory as absolute recuperation, as ‘recollection,’ that Hegel had invoked in the closing moments of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁹

Transience thus marks the very core of the idea of natural history. As a changed *perspective*, the concept of natural history assumes some important features

of Heideggerian world-disclosure, though this is a point that Adorno himself would surely have detested.¹⁰ It is world-disclosure in a very specific sense, for the new world that is disclosed through a novel use of language is precisely a world of *loss* and a spectre of meaninglessness. The idea entails the corrosion, the petrification, or the freezing-up of any large, harmonising and ultimately delusive claims toward trends of totality and meaning in the historical process, and instead an insight of the historical process itself as generating only concrete, singular, and utterly empirical facts and bodies, each 'transient,' which is to say, incapable of being incorporated into a meaning-giving conception of historical continuity and historical experience. Again, Adorno seems to understand this perspective on the singular and contingent within historical experience in terms of the 'riddling' or puzzle-like character that such contingent facts and bodies assume from the perspective of natural history. He implies that what is at stake in this introduction of fragments and concrete contingencies, deployed against totalising narratives of historical development, is an alternative logic of historiography according to which insight into history is to proceed by the construction of constellations of discrete elements of recovered historical experience, which then, suddenly and virtually involuntarily yield forth objectively valid insights into the historical process as a whole, when such constellations are 'read' in the proper interpretive light. This logic, otherwise so thoroughly Benjaminian, differs from Benjamin on one vital point. Constellations, as Adorno insists in the 1931 essay "The Actuality of Philosophy," are not to be regarded as providing 'solutions' to problems posed by the assemblage of recovered cultural material. Rather, such solutions are to be regarded as directions toward a political practice that would seek to dissolve the puzzle-like character of the real, rather than merely solving it. Firmly refusing any crypto-theological speculations in which the truth-content generated from acts of construction is referred to some substantiality beyond the phenomenal, Adorno insists that critical construction is linked with praxis:

He who interprets by searching beyond the phenomenal world for a world in itself which forms its foundation and support, acts mistakenly like someone who wants to find in the riddle the reflection of a being which lies behind it, a being mirrored in the riddle, in which it is contained. Instead, the function of riddle solving is to illuminate the riddle-Gestalt like light-

ning, and to sublimate it, not to persist behind the riddle and imitate it. Authentic philosophical interpretation does not meet up with a fixed meaning which already lies behind the question, but lights it up suddenly and momentarily, and consumes it at the same time.¹¹

Regardless of how we might assess the success of this claim to establishing a connection to praxis,¹² Adorno's firm conviction here is of the connection—in fact the identity—of the recovery of the singular, the historically contingent, and the transient, and the broader aims of unmasking critique:

Just as riddle solving is constituted, in that the singular and dispersed elements of the question are brought into various groupings long enough for them to come together into a figure out of which the solution springs forth, while the question disappears—so philosophy has to bring its elements, which it receives from the sciences, into changing constellations . . . into changing trial combinations, until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears.¹³

One way to understand the notion of 'natural history,' then, is to suggest that, as a form of shocking, disorienting, or disintegrative world-disclosure, it is intended to provide the necessary methodological preparation for the construction of such constellations, even if, as so often, Adorno declines to elaborate on precisely what sort of method could account for the spontaneous, *blitzhaft* way in which such constellations are to yield their moments of objective truth (which Benjamin calls 'dialectical images').¹⁴

However, I would like to suspend discussion of this 'constellative' logic for a moment, and focus instead on the methodological claim implied by the application of the optics of natural history. Again, the Benjaminian contribution to this notion is that, at the dialectical crossing point of nature and history stands the category of transience, the singularity that cannot be incorporated. In transience, nature can in its very naturalness only appear as historical, since it appears as the dimension that is fatefully condemned to the endless production of things that pass away, that take up time and then are not there any more. History, as the span of temporal duration inhabited by human action, is drained of its claims to inner coherence and meaning, by

the vision of its products and projects freezing into natural things; bodies that decay and die. Transience, as a perspective, concentrates on the singular, wholly contingent fragment of historical experience, and Adorno's insistence that such fragments be taken as ciphers or clues to some otherwise wholly inaccessible dimension of historical truth is, at this point at least, entirely Benjaminian—as are the virtually insurmountable problems entailed by the effort to expand theoretically on the possibilities of a logic of 'constructing constellations', problems that would, shortly after the "Natural History" lecture, lead to a deep rift between Benjamin and Adorno.¹⁵

I have been emphasising the methodological and virtually strategic aspect of Adorno's idea of natural history, which is the notion that, as an optical method or a perspective, it could bring about a shock-effect on the part of the critical researcher, thus constructing the range of possible subject matter for critical historiography. Adorno of course recognised that this notion of a shock was in and of itself an inadequate characterisation of his project. If, in the "Natural History" essay, Adorno thus rather suddenly introduces a number of theoretical postulates, it is in large measure to defray the suspicion that the de-familiarisation of historical consciousness that he is proposing may be nothing more than a sort of Schellingean re-enchantment of the category of historical time. "[H]istory," Adorno writes, "as it lies before us, presents itself as thoroughly discontinuous, not only in that it contains disparate circumstances and facts, but also because it contains structural disparities:"¹⁶ which is to say that natural history expresses first and foremost the insight into the unevenness, the lack of unity, in the experience of historical time. On an initial level, the 'structural disparity' of the experience of historical time can be taken as existing between two incommensurate and ultimately ambiguous aspects of historical time, which Adorno rather unsatisfactorily characterises as the presence of the "mythical archaic, natural material of history," that is, repetition, a figure that Adorno had used in the beginning of his essay to define nature, and "that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new," which Adorno had initially defined as history itself. That the archaic-repetitive and the new 'intertwine' in historical experience amounts to the claim that these two are just as much capable of dialectical development, to the point where their identity reverses, as are history and nature as concepts. Adorno refers not (or not only) to some abstract dimension of cultural mem-

ory classifiable as 'the mythic' on the basis of its purported timelessness, but literally to myths: he means that the very image of timelessness and repetition, of fantastic age, that clings like an aura to myths, stories that appear as archetypes that have always been with us, appears also as historically dynamic, which is to say that the image of timelessness is continuously created in the historical present and recast retrospectively. The 'disparate' character of myths—their unsettling tendency to say extremely modern things in the process of being old, which so fascinated the intellectual milieu from the Romantics to Freud—is, as a moment of natural history, now to be seen as the dialectical flash-point between nature and history as such. Very old myths neither re-win nor repeat actuality, but actuality occurs in the process in which the archaic is *constituted* in the process of the construction of the present. Hence, what appears as frozen only does so by its constitution through a dialectic. Adorno's example for this observation is, appropriately enough, the myth of Chronos, but we cannot help thinking of the later appropriation of the myth of Odysseus in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the status of the hero as the 'prototype' or *Urbild* of the bourgeois subject would mean not so much the survival of the timeless, but the construction of the image of timelessness through the present, hence the sort of collision between 'structural disparities' of past and present that make the revelation of the critical potential of the myth possible, and that serve to undermine from within the claim of seamless historical progress and temporal continuity which Horkheimer and Adorno describe as itself a moment of myth in the bad sense. Historical newness and mythic repetition construct and resist one another at the same time; generating the objective possibility of the perception of concrete historical moments in which this tension is impacted while simultaneously resisting the temptation to resolve this tension in any totalising sense of historical unity. Time is out of joint; the present is shot through with the past, and the past is seeded with moments of dialectical actuality. Where the present appears most up to date, natural history is designed to reveal a landscape strewn with relics, antiquities, and anachronisms; where the historical past appears at its most conveniently ancient and distant remove we unexpectedly encounter recapitulations, anticipations and projections: the result—or the intended result, in any case—is to bring about a sort of temporal vertigo, in which the image of a 'non-antagonistic' present is demythologised and revealed as illusion, as *Schein*, at the same time as the recovery of the historically contingent

and concrete provides the chance for a glimpse into an alternative history, a recovery of a different, critical form of recollection.

II

With this in mind we can perhaps usefully distinguish amongst three different if intimately related dimensions of the 'shocking' effect of the concept of natural history, along with the revisions in the theories of history and time consciousness that they would support. In distinguishing these three levels, or better, interlocking strategies for temporal re-visioning, I hope to suggest the extent to which the perspective of natural history entails the adoption of a critical theory of recollection, or at least demands the attempt to formulate one.

(a) Natural History and Philosophical Anthropology

On the initial level, certainly, Adorno's efforts to synthesise nature and history into a form of *Welterschließung* ought to be seen in relation to a familiar definition of natural history: the natural-scientific understanding of the developmental history of the natural world that emerged most clearly with the great period of naturalism from Buffon to Darwin: the task of describing the human species, and the historical emergence of those human faculties and aptitudes that define the species through its natural-historical interaction with a variety of external environments. Natural history implies a philosophical anthropology, as opposed to idealist introspection, as the mode appropriate for the exploration of the human condition.¹⁷ The practice of philosophical anthropology depends on a changed perspective of historical time: The quarter-million year history of the young human species is *both* far too long to be incorporated into familiar narratives of historical development, while simultaneously absurdly short in relation to the scales of natural-historical time that evolutionary theory imposes. Such a conflict produces the sort of historical disorientation in relation to the span of recorded human history that Adorno must have at least partly had in mind in his concept of natural history; in any event, the awareness of a requirement for a complete and uncharted transformation of time consciousness (which could serve as a thumbnail definition of intellectual modernity itself) had, for the generations after Darwin, the precipitate in an enduring interest, even a compulsion, in the retelling of

genesis narratives and the recreation of phylogenies, perhaps in an effort to forestall the impending sense of meaninglessness conveyed by the implications of Darwinian theory as much as anything else. For the dialectic of the vastly old and the impossibly new that is conveyed by this first sense of natural history is always accompanied by another, as it were, supplemental dialectic of meaning and meaninglessness; science explains the world, and thus robs it of its intrinsic meaning. Specifically, the implications of 'deep time' and Darwinism forbid any familiar strategies for the preservation of meaning in history, since the span of species time, let alone geological time, cannot be reconciled to the vision of history as being morally structured. There is simply too much time without anything in it; no moral appeals to the singularity of a given historical event—in the sense of its qualitative difference, its being deserving of remembrance—can withstand the scale of a quarter of a million years of hunting and gathering, let alone ten billion years of geological history, with the implications of our eventual, if not impending replacement by other dominant species who cannot be expected to share our moral preoccupations. (In this sense Nietzsche's attempt to 'moralise' the perspective of deep time by making the thought of eternal return the ultimate test of a tough mind seems, in hindsight, a curiously low hurdle, since the thought of 'persistent' if not eternal newness seems far more frightening than that of eternal repetition.)

Adorno was particularly sensitive to this dialectic, in which science re-enchants its subject matter by appropriating its own self-defining stories and recasting them in temporal terms that can be told only from its own perspective: *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* deployment of natural history seems to focus to an unacknowledged degree on the abyssal nature of time itself in its development of the historical dimension of the entwining of myth and enlightenment. The image of a great age cannot be kept dialectically pristine from that of the most recent; while science's mythicising tendency attempted to incorporate this 'new' time into an older narrative of historical progress, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (in perhaps its most purely Nietzschean moment) demonstrates the ultimately contradictory aspect of this attempt. For if reason is nothing other than a natural phenomenon (and as such is both impossibly old and ridiculously young, from the same perspective), then it displays a temporal 'structural disparity' that contradicts its own demands

for temporal continuity and historical progress at every turn. The revelation of reason as nature, as an evolutionary adaptation developed in order to persist in the ur-old struggle for individual biological self-preservation, is one of Adorno's most consistent theoretical ambitions. And yet the sheer 'fact of reason' as itself a part of nature was never in serious doubt; what had to be registered was the extent to which the realisation of the implications of natural history withdrew nature from any possible status as a fixed temporal origin, at the same time as rational subjectivity was robbed of its last illusory refuge in the structures of pure consciousness. In other words, natural history in this first sense shocks not so much through the mere fact of a biological basis for the autonomous ego (for who could ever have doubted such a thing?), but rather by the de-familiarisation of time that is the precondition for this fact, and perhaps above all through the de-familiarisation of meaning in history that is necessarily conveyed with it. This is the sense in which *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* effort to give one final, grim re-telling of the genesis narrative of the present assumes its oddly self-contradictory status: what has often been described as the performative self-contradiction at the heart of the work (if reason has created a *totaler Verblendungszusammenhang* of domination, how to account for the critique of it?) might be better understood as the performance of the dialectic of natural history itself: the critical self-reflection on the delusional genesis narrative of Western reason, which mistakes itself for a story of progress, cannot be squared with the narrative itself, which ought not to allow for its own retelling. This observation, which can be found elsewhere,¹⁸ supports the suspicion that the self-reference problem of the book is basically an attempt to demonstrate, rather than explicate, the peculiarities of time that structure the argument. Fredric Jameson, to take one angle on this problem, observes that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* performs an oddly postmodern trick of synchronisation by positing nature as an origin which it then subsequently renders impossible, as being 'always already' withdrawn from the subject, constituted by the subject, in the very act of subjective self-creation. Hence, origin recedes from the yearning gaze of subjectivity to the degree that it is approached. Once again, the present projects its own past; the new generates its other as archaic.¹⁹ While it is tempting to read the book in this eerily Foucauldian light from time to time, though, it seems to me that a postmodern synchrony (and the concomitant release of otherwise diachronously law-like and ordered relationships into a free space

of contingency) is precisely *not* what Horkheimer and Adorno achieve in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; rather, the dissolving of diachrony that their strangely self-cancelling genesis narrative performs tends far more toward a strange kind of anachronism, a complication rather than an evaporation of time.

(b) Natural History as the Critical Memory of Historical Suffering

What I mean by this can best be seen in another dimension of the optics of natural history: a powerful normative insight that seems all the more startling in light of the corrosion of the normative claims for historical experience that accompanied natural history in its first incarnation. What the first form of de-familiarisation takes away—the possibility of a moral dimension of the experience of time—stages a strange sort of self-recuperation in the central category of transience. This is the modality of natural history that demands a category of *critical memory*.

Earlier we saw Adorno's appropriation of Benjamin's category of the transient creature as the dialectical crossing-point of history and nature. The demythologising effect of this category is clear enough; what is transient loses any plausible claims to permanence, to effect, to continuity. As transient, historical entities appear as bereft and 'always already' ruined, as if their impending moment of complete historical extinction, which defines their very essence, somehow had managed to step in front of itself and precede them in their brief interlude of presence.

What is less clear is the sense in which 'transience' already constitutes a normative category. That which is transient is that whose individuality consists entirely in its status as about-to-go, whose presence, as it were, already can only be defined by its absence. In this sense, transience is the particular fate of historical entities, which, in their fungibility and replaceability, are *historical* entities precisely and only insofar as they pass into history: their essence has been supplanted by their impending non-existence. What is transient is that which has been so converted into material that it loses any claim to distinction, and merely marks time. Transitoriness, in other words, is a temporal relation that is always constituted *retrospectively*, which is to say that that which is transient is that which, as it turns out, can no longer be remembered,

indeed can only be thought at all as that which has been forgotten: in fact 'incapable of being remembered' is a rough equivalent, here, for what Adorno means by '*Vergänglichkeit*'. It is the absence of any meaning-giving structure or context in which an entity can be situated in time; it marks all the huge portions of a shared lifeworld that vanish without a trace as the lifeworld moves through time; elements that are non-recuperable.

The normative dimension of this version of transience consists in the anti-Idealist, specifically anti-Hegelian claim that conditions that render persons transient or unmemorable, non-recuperable in this sense are social conditions that make impossible the memory of historical suffering. Modernity is a memory crisis—a series of disruptions, discontinuities, transformations, and upheavals in the faculties of remembering and forgetting, and the social-political contexts for these faculties.²⁰ This appears most clearly in a famous aphorism in the notes to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "All reification is a forgetting."²¹ Adepts of the book will recall that the line occurs at the end of the section entitled "*Le Prix du Progres*," which quotes at considerable length the reflections of the French physician Pierre Flourens, who opposed the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic during surgical procedures on the grounds of evidence that the chemical did not in fact deaden physical pain—quite the opposite—but merely rendered the patient incapable of remembering it. Flourens objects to this grisly fact as "too high a price to be paid for progress."

In their commentary Horkheimer and Adorno point out that, had Flourens' warnings and those like them been heeded, and had the natural sciences and instrumental reason as a whole been able to incorporate some non-instrumental criterion of appropriateness to regulate their own expansion (for example, an undamaged mimesis that would have established a kind of bodily sympathy as an ineffaceable moment within reason), the "dark paths of the divine world order would have, for once, been justified."

Flourens' reservations in the face of the logic of scientific discovery, on the contrary, implied an inner connection between the growth of rationality and the compulsory forgetting of bodily suffering and vulnerability; indeed Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the latter is the condition for the possibility of the former. ("The loss of memory is a transcendental condition for science.")²² Memory-loss, specifically the forgetfulness of the overwhelming

fact of the sheer quantum of physical pain that constitutes the 'material' of history, thus becomes the requisite accomplishment for the institution of subjectivity, a clear if somewhat elliptical negation of Nietzsche's natural-historical argument connecting the inauguration of memory with the fear of physical pain in the form of punishment,²³ as well as the dominant Hegelianism that affirms the connection between history and suffering only by dismissing bodily life as timeless while effacing the memory of suffering in a final *Er-innerung* of world spirit.²⁴ In this sense, in the sense of some deep, new/old connection between the ability to dehumanise and the ability to forget, that dimension of humans that is body, Horkheimer and Adorno argue for a functional equivalent between 'that which suffers' and 'that which cannot (must not) be remembered.' In other words, the concept of natural history—here in the sense of the creature who suffers in time—serves to reveal that *transience* itself is in the context of the world as it is already a moral term, insofar as transience is the mark of the *forgetting* of the bodily suffering that constitutes the material of historical time.

Such a claim asserts the possibility of a critical memory that, by resisting the effacement of suffering in time, also exposes those social and material conditions that sustain and require the reign of amnesia. One form that such a critical memory might assume is a counter-narrative of the institution of the subject. Another is a counter-history of the commodity structure, one that insisted on a disclosive perspective on commodities in which their 'metaphysical subtleties' fell away to reveal the physical, human contours of the alienated labour necessary for their production and dissemination, a recovery of what Bourdieu called the 'genesis narrative' of the commodity itself.²⁵ This position leads to the possibility of a critical-materialist theory of temporality, of the social construction of time according to concrete material conditions; at the heart of any such theory would stand the status of the commodity as a tension-laden temporal structure.²⁶ A third possibility is the development of a theory of intergenerational justice; or, as in the later work of Max Horkheimer, an attempt to derive moral insights from the very impossibility of such intergenerational justice.²⁷ Moral indignation at the irredeemability of past suffering evaporates the utopian dimension of critical theory: memory of past suffering cannot be reconciled with a future present of emancipation conceived of as fulfilment. But a strong tradition within first

generation Critical Theory identified just this situation as a motor for critical insight and political engagement.²⁸

(c) Natural History as a Transformation of Subject-Object Relationships: *Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt*

The claim of a deep connection between reification and the refusal to allow physical suffering to register in memory needs to be read alongside the more familiar, if equally cryptic evocation of a “remembrance [*Eingedenken*] of nature in the subject.”²⁹

While never adequately developed (while certainly never even approaching the level of a ‘theory’ of memory, which at this point would appear to be virtually the only thing required), this notion of *Eingedenken* crystallises the normative claim of the concept of natural history, for it demands that we take seriously the possibility that the only possible convergence of subjectivity, and that which lies outside it, other than the self-consuming and inherently violent dialectic of self-assertion through self-identification, of conceptualisation through eating, is in effect an anamnestic one.³⁰ *Eingedenken* refers to the capacity of the subject to allow thought to be permeated with that which it is not without this provoking an allergic abreaction; conversely (a reversal built into the grammatical ambiguity of the formula *Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt*), this unknown faculty also refers to the possibility that nature could allow itself to be contacted without reverting, in the very process, to a form of myth: ‘Thinking,’ reads the bad news of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “in whose mechanism of compulsion nature is reflected and persists, inescapably reflects its very own self as its own forgotten nature—as a mechanism of compulsion.”³¹ Hence the structural ambiguity in Horkheimer and Adorno’s account when it comes to describing the possibility of *some* alternative or escape from this inescapable mechanism. The eccentric term *Eingedenken* splits the difference amongst several possibilities, since it might refer to an act or even a faculty of remembering, of recuperating a past experience in the form of a mental representation [*Erinnerung*]; or might just as well hint at some vaguer capacity that could, as Benjamin thought, be described in terms of a mimetic *faculty* that has been walled over in the course of historical time; or might just as well be defined only negatively as a pervasive sense of having

forgotten something unrecoverable, which now presses on the limits of subjective consciousness without ever reaching the force of a Proustian involuntary memory or a Freudian-style *Aha-Erlebnis*, the two models of super-subjective, shattering-redeeming memory on which this period, so intent in any case on the phenomenon of personal memory, seems to have fixated. *Eingedenken*, which is most frequently translated as 'mindfulness', seems to invite all these possibilities; in any event, the paradox on which all these rest is also encoded in the word, since to speak at all of an *Eingedenken* of nature in the subject is to refer at least implicitly to the possibility of remembering what has been forgotten: in this case not just the suffering of history, but of the very act of having forgotten it in the first place. To speak of *Eingedenken* is to remember that one once had it, which entails the remembering of the historical loss of memory; what on the surface appears a logical *cul-de-sac*. To remember the forgetting of historical suffering is, however, apparently the task that the truly reasonable moment of enlightenment has left to accomplish; like the fragment "*Le Prix du Progres*," the introduction of *Eingedenken* at the end of the introductory chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* takes this as its goal: once again, the notion of historical progress is opposed to the material suffering that underwrites it, and the purely moral task of reason is to find a way of *thinking* back into the image of history, under the sign of transience, all that which is historical precisely by not being remembered. Just as in the Benjaminian conception, the concept of natural history calls for the vision of human history as a *Leidensgeschichte*. The 'entities' that appear in it under the sign of transience are persons about whom we only know that they are immemorable, not because they are not empirically remembered but because they are committed to an historical span which is dedicated to ensuring that they are not remembered, since it has no mechanism for coping with suffering in history (in fact suffering *as* history) save for its efficient elimination.

This sort of recovery project is, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and other of Adorno's works often related to the critique of the 'effacement' or forgetting of death in modern society. For example, the notes to the former work will mention a 'theory of ghosts' (a passage certainly more Horkheimerian than Adornian) that castigates the incapacity of modern subjects to cope with the death of others as a symptom of the progressive tendency toward the fragmentation of life and memory as such:

The disturbed relationship with the dead—forgotten and embalmed—is one of the symptoms of the sickness of experience today. One might almost say that the notion of human life as the unity in the history of an individual has been abolished: the life of the individual is defined only by its opposite, destruction, but all harmony and all continuity of conscious and involuntary memory have lost their meaning.³²

As the moral dimension of natural history, *Eingedenken* is meant to disclose the world as a *Leidensgeschichte*. Disclosive memory—that is the only thing to call it at this point—does not ‘rescue’ or ‘redeem’ past suffering, unless we simply choose to use these religiously freighted words to refer to the perfectly secular task of forbidding a forgetfulness on the basis of some other consideration than efficiency. And in this sense, the end-result of this second dimension of natural history is the imperative of a kind of remembering solidarity; solidarity with the anonymous victims of a history of violence in which the past and present interpenetrate.³³ “Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope.”³⁴

This moral imperative, which reaches a kind of mournful crescendo in the concluding moments of *Negative Dialectics*, is, probably with good reason, usually regarded as a sort of theoretical finale for the authors of classical critical theory, in the sense that an ‘anamnestic solidarity’ with the past shatters the last possibility for theoretical elaboration, thus jettisoning the last possibility for a rational *Letztbegründung* of the normative dimension of critique, and thereafter gliding gently into the consolations of religion, as in the late Horkheimer, or art, as in the late Adorno, or some psychoanalytic no-man’s land between the two, as in the rhapsodic invocation of redemptive memory in the concluding pages of Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilisation*.³⁵ Indeed the prevailing interpretation of first generation critical theory associates the turn to memory with capitulation, pessimism, and the hermeticism of modernist art. This ‘message in a bottle’ reading of critical memory was promulgated largely by Habermas himself in the sections on Horkheimer and Adorno in the first volume of the *Theory of Communicative Action*, and the chapter on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.³⁶

Given the ultimate fate of the natural history concept in Adorno's own work, as we shall see, this interpretation remains largely, albeit incompletely, justified. It could also be said, though, that the turn to the past in critical theory is, in its normative dimension, not so much an act of capitulation, or the adoption of a merely retrospective stance upon the historical process in the face of the aporetic consequences of the thesis of the 'context of total domination,' but rather that it is just this turn to the past that allows the hegemonic facade of this thesis to crumble a bit. For if, in the case of Adorno, the normative formulation of the concept of natural history contains a moral imperative to establish a new vision of the past in the name of a barely articulable solidarity with the transient, then the *manner* in which this is to be done need not at all be thought of in the dismal terms of the *Aesthetic Theory*. I had earlier talked about the crumbling of any serene sense of diachrony in Adorno's work as a complication, rather than an evaporation of time; in his earliest theoretical works, Adorno understood the normative imperative implicit in the concept of natural history to combine with the methodological dimension of this idea, in the project of the philosophical interpretation of the historically singular and contingent itself. In the concept of natural history, the thought of that which is historically contingent, its physiognomic reconstruction in the interpretive act itself both names and in the process violates the spell of transience. In *Negative Dialectics*, this methodology becomes explicit:

The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are non-conceptuality, individuality, and particularity—things which ever since Plato have been dismissed as transitory and insignificant, as a *quantite negligible*.³⁷

The effort to think the particular is in essence an attempt to allow the appearance of what resists conceptual determination to appear, even if only as a negative, within the very totalising work of the identifying concept itself. This leads the *Negative Dialectics* in the direction of a micrology: the search for a method for encountering the concrete "compels our thinking to abide with minutiae. We are not to philosophise about concrete things; we are to philosophise, rather, out of these things."³⁸ This is a "philosophy in fragment form."³⁹ Still what is so noticeable about Adorno's later theoretical work is its absence of the concrete, which is to say its stubborn concentration on the

problem of the conceptual relation to concretion without the parallel attempt to present the concrete character itself: in contrast to his earlier works, the image-character of the later theoretical works dries up and vanishes. Certainly the *intention* of a kind of Benjaminian 'objective meaning' meant to spring suddenly from constructed constellations of the most graphic and concrete historical material does not disappear in Adorno's later theoretical work, as attested by the following quote which borrows from the 1932 essay but slants its language decidedly toward the theological:

This is the transmutation of metaphysics into history. It secularises metaphysics in the secular category pure and simple; the category of decay. Philosophy interprets that pictography, the ever new Mene Tekel, in microcosm—in fragments which decay has chipped, and which bear the objective meanings. No recollection of transcendence is possible any more, save by way of perdition; eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted through the most perishable.⁴⁰

As is well-known Adorno's later writings appeal increasingly to art to describe what he simultaneously insists to be the purely philosophical task of interpreting objective reality by the analysis of its most concrete elements. The shocking emergence of a recovered image from the past that such a process seems to have been aiming at is in the later Adorno increasingly attributed to that moment in modern art where mimesis and rationality can however momentarily interact. For this, Proust seems to be Adorno's chief referent: what earlier had been conceived as the momentary interpenetration of the elements of prehistory with the most recent is in Proust recast as the interpenetration of early childhood and the reflective powers of adult life. Thus, Proust's involuntary memory as a product of the extreme development of the perspective of natural history: the extraordinary character of Proust's prose lies in the fact that,

the reader feels addressed by it as by an inherited memory, an image that suddenly flashes out, perhaps in a foreign city, an image that one's own parents must have seen long before one's own birth . . . Proust looks at even adult life with such alien and wondering eyes that under his immersed gaze the present is virtually transformed into prehistory, into childhood.⁴¹

Proust's sensitivity to the sign of transience leads him to the heroic effort to transform the very images of transience themselves (which are always linked to suffering) with a tremendous desire for happiness, which for Adorno appears to be something like the recuperation of an absolute presence or the birth of an absolute present:

The polarity of happiness and transience directs [Proust] to memory. Undamaged experience is produced only in memory, far beyond immediacy, and through memory, aging and death seem to be overcome in the aesthetic image. But this happiness achieved through the rescue of an image, a happiness that will not let anything be taken from it, represents the unconditional renunciation of consolation. Rather the whole of life be sacrificed for complete happiness than one bit of it be accepted that does not meet the criterion of utmost fulfillment. This is the inner story of the *Remembrance of Things Past*. Total reminiscence is the response to total transience, and hope lies only in the strength to become aware of transience and preserve it in writing.⁴²

In this writing Adorno seems to have seen the realisation—in the form of the literary novel, in any case—of the moment of natural history in which the span of historical time as *Leidensgeschichte* is momentarily abridged through the recovery of an element of absolute concreteness within it; here once again natural history emerges as the temporary unity of methodology and something that can still be called a moral intuition: the artwork alone is capable of representing universality in its very dwelling on the tiniest fragmentary detail of its subject matter.

III

Adorno's concept of natural history begins as a programmatic proposal for an alternative methodology for critical sociology; it ends in a theory of aesthetic modernity. That was Adorno's trajectory; it need not be the trajectory of the concept of natural history itself. The elements I have sketched above comprise challenges and resources—problems and opportunities—for the discursive model of critical social theory. In this concluding section, I will make some suggestive comments on how these problems and opportunities can be taken.

Habermas' discourse-theoretical revision of critical theory is in very large measure, a stage in a longer relationship between philosophy and philosophical anthropology. Habermas' own theoretical trajectory shows this clearly enough; the high-water mark of Habermas' own efforts to re-appropriate the progressive German tradition of philosophical anthropology through American pragmatism, in the essays on the reconstruction of historical materialism and in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, yielded to a far more anti-naturalist position with the turn to universal pragmatics, and ever since that anti-naturalist turn Habermas has consistently rejected the prospect of a mutually open dialogue between naturalist and anti-naturalist interpretations of communicative reason.

The reasons for this inflexibility are in fact extremely complex and involve both factors internal to discourse theory and external, historical factors specific to the political and cultural context in which Habermas has worked. Habermas has always been acutely aware of the political and normative implications of philosophical anthropology. He has remained highly sensitive to the resources of the progressive, social-democratic tradition of German philosophical anthropology running from (Jena period) Hegel through the Left Hegelians, Marx, the social-democratic wing of neo-Kantians (Cassirer) and progressive German sociology (Plessner). But the culturally conservative tradition of German philosophical anthropology, which appropriated discourses from the natural sciences in order to justify strong institutions as compensations for the vulnerabilities of a fragile and under-adapted human organism is for Habermas an *ongoing* threat to critical social science.⁴³ That tradition culminated in the work of Arnold Gehlen, Adorno's arch-nemesis in the battle over the status of sociology, the image of the public intellectual, and the conception of democratic life of the early Federal Republic. Yet for Habermas, who has carried the battle against Gehlen onward to the present day, *both* Adorno and Gehlen represent the unwelcome consequences of a pessimistic philosophical anthropology; both read the history of reason back to the species-time of a vulnerable and violent animal, and while Adorno and Gehlen draw different political conclusions from this history, both conclusions (defeatist, in Adorno's case; reactionary and anti-democratic in Gehlen's) are the results of unwarranted philosophical premises. Both Gehlen and Adorno fail to distinguish natural-scientific and normative discourses adequately—meaning they fail to iden-

tify a communicative as well as a strategic mode of rationality. Both misdiagnose the pathologies and promises of social modernity. Both are consigned to the rogue's gallery of the philosophical discourse of modernity, Adorno with frustrated affection and regret, Gehlen with undying enmity.

Here, my suspicion is that a re-appropriation of Adorno's natural history concept problematises both Habermas' position on the Adorno of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the general problem of philosophical anthropology in productive ways.

That this position stands in need of friendly problematisation is clear. Habermas' recent (2003) writings on the normative dimension of new reproductive technologies and 'genetic ethics' are collected in the short book on *The Future of Human Nature*, whose title hints at a new dialogic opening between the natural and normative sciences. Instead, the argument insists that the normative implications of new technologies threaten to transform the material, bodily basis for the reciprocity and symmetry conditions of intersubjective agreement (by making some embodied subjects conscious of the bodily basis of their existence as the consequence of the asymmetrical choices of another subject).⁴⁴ For Habermas, sober, moral (deontological) arguments concerning the need to protect the conditions for intersubjective reciprocity intermingle with a palpable horror at the spectre of a humanity transforming its own bodily existence through a 'positive eugenics' increasingly beyond discursive regulation. It is this horror (traceable, no doubt, to historically concrete causes) that actually drives the argument; Habermas argues that a properly conducted moral discourse on the implications of new technologies could only result in placing strong limits on individual therapies and procedures, thus making current discursive outcomes definitive for the kind of future debates that *ought not* to happen. Moral argumentation is appropriated as a theoretical dam to contain future discourses that do not conform to the current interpretation of what does and does not count as the protection of the 'deontic shell' of vulnerable subjects. While natural history in Adorno's sense does not offer any unambiguous answers to the problem of Habermas' flat refusal of philosophical anthropology, it insists that the stark either/or between naturalist and anti-naturalist positions in epistemology is impossible to sustain: natural history, as a dialectical construction, demands the ongoing interrogation of the postulates on which anti-naturalism rests, and suggests that

such postulates revert to their opposite under the pressure of reflection. This may mean nothing beyond the well-intentioned reminder of the project of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, in which the epistemic accomplishments of speakers and hearers was rooted in the species-specific history of the human animal. It might serve as support for the critical-theoretical re-appropriation of philosophical anthropology, a project Axel Honneth began with *The Struggle for Recognition*. Or, in the natural-historical posing of the question of meaning in history, it might serve as a challenge to the vestigial philosophy of historical progress implicit in the *Theory of Communicative Action's* conception of social modernity as social and cultural learning processes.

This last suggestion leads to an inquiry on the 'presentism' of discourse theory; its evacuation of the category of memory. An assumption of discourse theory seems to be that, in the paradigm-shift to intersubjectivity and the adoption of a rigorously postmetaphysical philosophical perspective, one simply parts company from the older problematics of time-consciousness (which would appear hopelessly mired in a monological philosophy of consciousness, as part of a doctrine of faculties or a phenomenology of perception), and the philosophy of history (which would be an non-recuperable bit of metaphysics). This rejection however, in the absence of anything to replace it, does occasionally give the impression that discourse theory in general is characterised as 'presentism': there is very little sense of the past in the theory of communicative action, apart from its unproblematic status as the material for rational reconstruction, or of developmental levels left behind in the process of modernisation and differentiation of lifeworlds. The time of justification, like the time of obligation, is always Now; the tension between fact and norm is one free of diachrony, insofar as it juxtaposes a here-now of a given validity claim with a context-transcendence of justificatory inclusion that assumes an open-ended future and a finished past. One might initially ask, then, whether there is a way that the 'shocking' perspective of natural history, transposed from a subject-nature model to one of intersubjectivity, might enter into this unproblematic view of the collective past and of shared time, and problematise it a bit.

The normative kernel of the methodological practice of rational reconstruction is itself motivated by the basic normative orientation of universalism: from the point of view of discourse theory, the past appears as a field of vio-

lently missed opportunities for consensus, making 'reconstruction' itself a form of critical memory, since the theoretical reconstruction of universal competence is not allowed to conduct itself in ignorance of the concrete historical circumstances in which this competence were or were not permitted to develop.

Moreover, such a view opens up the prospect of the past as *Leidensgeschichte*—now no longer understood in terms of the failed interactions between subjectivity and nature, or even primarily as the medium of bodily suffering condemned to oblivion, but rather as the world of all unsuccessful or thwarted efforts at communicatively coordinated interaction, all misfired intersubjectivities, all systematically distorted communication. And this might act to correct the impression that one occasionally receives from Habermas' work that, while the theoretical structure intended to generate plausible explanations for the fact of injustice is powerfully developed, the reality of historical injustice, what it *looks like* to behold a world in which injustice is the norm, is so carefully excised from the level of theory (to migrate to ethical and political, contextual essays and interventions in the public sphere), that wrongness itself, whether in the form of 'systematically distorted communication' or the 'inner colonisation of the lifeworld' is articulated at a higher level of abstraction than is really necessary or even helpful. At the very least, then, perhaps Adorno's concept of natural history, translated into the pathologies of communication that cannot help but structure our view of the natural history of communicative interaction, might serve to provide an alternative idiom for the task of rational reconstruction, a more jagged and visceral language that would help demonstrate the way in which distorted communication actually manifests itself in the empirical world that theory describes. And this is precisely what is meant by the proposal to supplement discourse theory with a variant of world-disclosive language capable of opening up new modes for the understanding of the objects of criticism. There is already a large literature on the possibility of disclosive language and its relation to Habermasian theory which I will not enter into here.⁴⁵ But it is worth bearing in mind that the relation between truth claims and disclosure is dialectical. Nikolas Kompridis has argued persuasively for a view that moves beyond an antinomial either-or between disclosive and reason-giving uses of language.⁴⁶ More recently, Axel Honneth has demonstrated that the categories

of natural history in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* constitute important elements of a world-disclosive mode of social criticism aimed at just those harms, losses, and pathologies that tend to slip through the net of Habermasian social theory.⁴⁷

Beyond this, however, the perspective of natural history would seem to open up another sort of question for Habermas' work, this time addressing the formalised temporalities that it depends upon. For if, as in Adorno, the vision of a *Leidensgeschichte* is rooted in the insight of a link between forgetting and domination, then one would want a more detailed picture of how forgetting is to work in a theory of communicative action in general. What is it about the shared past, from a discourse-theoretical point of view, that is lost as a result of the systematic thwarting of communicative interaction? Another way of asking this question is to wonder how, in the theory of communicative action, we are to distinguish between non-pathological and pathological collective forgetting. If modern lifeworlds are characterised above all by their changed relation to the past—if, that is, modernity itself consists of the process in which tradition, a shared past, is devalued and can no longer unproblematically serve to provide pre-formed situation interpretations and specifications of action—then how ought we to distinguish between the process of oblivion, the loss of the past, in modern lifeworlds as a result of rationalisation processes *as such*, versus those kinds of losses and oblivions that are strategic, orchestrated, and consist in the actual blocking of semantic resources from the lifeworld? I take this to be the question concerning the loss of semantic potentials for collective self-reflection that Habermas raised, but never definitively settled, in his 1972 essay on Walter Benjamin.⁴⁸ A critical theory of collective memory would also be a critical theory of collective forgetting. If lifeworlds are in essence to be understood *both* as 'storehouses' or reservoirs of 'traditional knowledge' and 'unproblematic' or 'pre-interpretive' orientations, *and* as inherently unstable, dynamic, and creative, then the process of the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld (and the systemic incursions into this reproduction) would have to be explained both in terms of the retention and the disappearance of symbolic structures and semantic resources.

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Notes

- ¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Telos*, vol. 60, p. 117. The passage recurs in *Negative Dialektik*, p. 353.
- ² For more on this see Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1992, chapter 2.
- ³ Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," p. 118.
- ⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism. Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, Verso, London, 1993, p. 94.
- ⁵ Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," p. 118.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ The classic English version is of course Susan Buck-Morss', *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*, The Free Press, New York, 1977.
- ⁸ As Buck-Morss puts it, "Nature provided the key for exposing the non-identity between the concept of history (as a regulative idea) and historical reality, just as history provided the key for demythifying nature. Adorno argued, on the one hand, that actual past history was not identical to the concept of history (as rational progress) because of the material *nature* to which it did violence. At the same time, the 'natural' phenomena of the present were not identical to the concept of nature because [. . .] they had been historically produced." Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, p. 49.
- ⁹ See Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 18 ff.
- ¹⁰ See Martin Seel, "On Rightness and Truth: Reflections on the Concept of World Disclosure," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 37, 1994, pp. 64-81.
- ¹¹ Adorno, "Die Aktualität der Philosophie," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 340.
- ¹² For an especially lucid account, see Wolfgang Bonss, "Empirie und Dechiffrierung von Wirklichkeit. Zur Methodologie bei Adorno," *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*, eds. Ludwig von Freideburg and Jürgen Habermas, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1983.
- ¹³ Adorno, "Die Aktualitaet der Philosophie," pp. 340-341.
- ¹⁴ On this question see Max Pensky, "On Method and Time: Walter Benjamin's Dialectical Images," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David Ferris, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.
- ¹⁵ See Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, chapters 3 and 6.
- ¹⁶ Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," p. 122.
- ¹⁷ For a definitive account of the intellectual foundations of natural history, see Wolf Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte. Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeiten in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Hanser Verlag, Munich, 1976.

- ¹⁸ Specifically, in Buck-Morss' *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, p. 59. See also Jameson, *Late Marxism*, pp. 95-97.
- ¹⁹ See Jameson, *Late Marxism*, p. 109.
- ²⁰ See Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993.
- ²¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Continuum, New York, 1994, p. 229.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- ²³ See Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral*, 2, III, Schlechta III s, pp. 802-04.
- ²⁴ See the conclusion of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*; see also *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Jubilaeumsausgabe III, p. 202.
- ²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, quoted in Terdiman, *Present Past*, p. 34.
- ²⁶ For elements of such a theory, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. See also Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, Verso, London, 1995, and H.A. Kittsteiner, "Historical Time in Karl Marx," *History and Memory*, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall-Winter, 1991, pp. 45-86.
- ²⁷ See Max Horkheimer's later essays, "Materialism and Metaphysics" and "Thoughts on Religion," where Horkheimer comments on the utopian dream of absolute or universal justice: "It is impossible that such justice should ever become a reality within history. For, even if a better society develops and eliminates the present order, there will be no compensation for the wretchedness of past ages and no end to the distress of nature. We are dealing therefore with a [Kantian] illusion, the spontaneous growth of ideas which probably arose out of primitive exchange. The principle that each one must have his share and that each one has the same basic right to happiness is a generalisation of economically conditioned rules. Their extension into the infinite. Yet the urge to such a conceptual transcending of the possible, to this impotent revolt against reality, is part of man as he has been moulded by history. What distinguishes the progressive type of man from the retrogressive is not the refusal of the idea but the understanding of the limits set to its fulfilment." Max Horkheimer, "Thoughts on Religion," *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, Continuum, New York, 1972, pp. 129-30.
- ²⁸ On this question see the classic essay by Christian Lenhardt, "Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and its *Manes*," *Telos* 25, 1975, pp. 133-154, which is widely misread as arguing for a theologically-tinged conception of memory as an end in itself; in fact Lenhardt's far more radical argument was the appropriation of the memory of unredeemed suffering of a past generation as a motor for revolutionary politics.

- ²⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 42.
- ³⁰ For a definitive account of the connection between *Eingedenken* and memory, see Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, *Das Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt. Zur Dialektik von Vernunft und Natur in der kritischen Theorie Horkheimers, Adornos, und Marcuses*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1990, especially Chapter One, "Geschichte als Natur—die Perspektive der Naturgeschichte."
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ³² Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 215-16.
- ³³ An interesting discussion of this notion of "Solidarität mit dem vergangenen Leiden" can be found in Mirko Wischke, *Die Geburt der Ethik. Schopenhauer—Nietzsche—Adorno*, Akademie Verlag, Heidelberg 1994, pp. 148-155.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- ³⁵ A good example would be Seyla Benhabib's *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 179, which describes the turn to memory in critical theory as the moment where, faced with the aporetic consequences of the thesis of a total context of domination, "critical theory no longer moves within the horizon of *prospective* future transformation, but must retreat into the *retrospective* stance of past hope and remembrance. Critical theory becomes a retrospective monologue of the critical thinker upon the totality of this historical process, for it views the lived present not through the perspective of possible future transformation, but from the standpoint of the past."
- ³⁶ For a summary of this 'message in a bottle' reading and its problems, see Max Pensky, "Beyond the Message in a Bottle: The Other Critical Theory," review essay of Alex Demirovic, *Der nonkonformistische Intellektuelle. Die Entwicklung der Kritischen Theorie zur Frankfurter Schule*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1999, in *Constellations*, vol. 10, no. 1, March, 2003, pp. 135-144.
- ³⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, New York, 1973, p. 8.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 360.
- ⁴¹ Theodor Adorno, "On Proust," *Notes to Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, volume II, p. 315.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 317.
- ⁴³ For Habermas's most recent thoughts on the social-democratic *versus* cultural-conservative dynamics within the tradition of German philosophical anthropology, see his essay "Symbolic Expression and Ritual Behavior: Ernst Cassirer and Arnold Gehlen in Hindsight," *Time of Transitions*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004 (forthcoming).

- ⁴⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ See the essays collected in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 3, 1993, many of which were reprinted in *Thesis Eleven*, no. 37, 1994. For Habermas' own position on world disclosure, see "Entegnung" eds. Hans Joas and Axel Honneth, *Kommunikatives Handeln*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1986.
- ⁴⁶ Nikolas Kompridis, "On World Disclosure: Heidegger, Habermas, and Dewey," *Thesis Eleven*, no. 37, 1994, pp. 29-45.
- ⁴⁷ Axel Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism," *Constellations*, vol. 7, no. 1, March, 2000, pp. 116-127.
- ⁴⁸ Jürgen Habermas, "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Criticism," *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983.

Martin Seel

Adorno's Contemplative Ethics

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that there is an ethics of contemplation that is internal to Adorno's critique of modern functionalised and administered societies. It is argued here that 'contemplation' is Adorno's name for a praxis by which one is open to the other; and yet can let the other be. Adorno sees a kernel of experience in such contemplative practices, which, although increasingly being stripped bare by the modern world, is the basis for its possible critique.

KEYWORDS: Adorno, ethics, contemplation, recognition, critique of administration

Summer 2003 marked the occasion of Theodor W. Adorno's one-hundredth birthday. The timing of this anniversary was propitious. Adorno is no longer the favourite of intellectual culture, and yet he has not been completely forgotten—good preconditions for reconsideration. Perhaps even something more than a reconsideration may succeed at this time; namely, the elimination of restrictive readings, for which both the interpretative public and the author himself are partly responsible. It may be time to free Adorno's philosophy from the dogma and trauma of its negativity, from its sometimes-obsessive fixation with Hegel, and from the impression

of a concentration on artistic problems. It may also be time to lay bare the ethical coordinates that mark every line of his social and political diagnoses. Adorno finally belongs, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, to those authors who did not write an ethics, only because their works are themselves an ethics through and through. The question is only: what kind of ethics?

The point of departure to address this question is a phenomenological one. Adorno looks into how the subject finds him or herself both in and in front of the world. The world that comes into expression in this investigation is not the world as a totality, but rather the historical world of modern life. Likewise the subject with which this mode of philosophising begins is not the subject in general, but rather a particular subject—that of the author himself. In the Introduction to *Minima Moralia* this point of departure is expressed succinctly: “In each of the three parts the starting point is the narrowest private sphere, that of the intellectual in emigration. From this follow considerations of broader social and anthropological scope.”¹

Adorno proceeds in this way from the earliest until the latest of his texts. Beginning with his own experiences, he attempts to speak not only of these, but also to investigate and understand their conditions in terms of how they may influence many or all people. The voice of his philosophy is the voice of a subject that understands him or herself as one among others [*eines unter anderen*], and who is therefore not permitted to remain stationary in his or her self-understanding. This methodological maxim is, for Adorno, at the same time a moral maxim. “This not-positing-oneself” [*Nicht-sich-selber-setzen*], says Adorno in his Lecture on *Problems of Moral Philosophy* of the summer semester of 1963, “actually appears to me to be the central thing to be demanded of all individuals in general.”² This self-distance, demanded in both practical and theoretical activity, can win only those who are capable of being self-confident in a fruitful way. “To a humanity that reflects upon itself,” as it is called in the same lecture, there belongs on the one side, “a moment of unswerving persistence, of holding fast to what one believes oneself to have learned from experience, and on the other hand (. . .) consciousness of our own fallibility, and in that respect I would say that the element of self-reflection has today become the true heir to what used to be called moral categories.”³

Adorno's texts can be read as a continuing experiment with this attitude. Morality here is not, in the first instance, that which is demanded, but much more that which is shown, that which is displayed in the movement of reflection. The phenomenology of individual experience under the living conditions of modernity *is* already a morality, a morality that is essentially an awareness of the difficulties that attend individual self-existence. The objectivity and universality that Adorno claims so energetically for his insights is the result of a reflective subjectivism. This reflective subjectivism is a way of articulating what it is like to lead a pressured existence in the 'administered world', not just for *me* alone, but rather for *anybody*. In his programmatic piece on the *Essay as Form*, Adorno calls upon Marcel Proust for this procedure. His work is "a single attempt to express necessary and compelling insights into human beings and social relations that are not readily accommodated within science and scholarship."⁴ Because from what, if not sharable and communicable subjective experience, should the normative sources that are an unavoidable footing for the knowledge of the reality of life come? And how, if not through an 'experimental' reflection on what and how things are done to humans, should the conditions of a comparatively un-pressured [*unbedrängten*] life come to be known? "The measure of such objectivity," Adorno accordingly observes, "is not the verification of assertions through repeated testing but rather individual human experience, maintained through hope and disillusionment. Such experience throws its observations into relief through confirmation or refutation in the process of recollection."⁵

As the basis of a normative theory of society this is certainly fragile—and also risky. In aphorism 19 of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno turns to the mechanised/technologised [*technisierten*] life-world of his American surroundings. "In the movements" he notes

which machines demand of their users there already lies the violent, hard-hitting, unceasing spasms of fascist maltreatment. Not least to blame for the withering of experience is the fact that things, under the law of pure functionality, take on a form that limits contact with them to mere operation, without tolerating a surplus, either in freedom of conduct or the autonomy of things, which would survive as a core of experience, because it is not consumed in the moment of action.⁶

As an example he refers to the doors of cars and 'Frigidaires', both of which are forced to slam so that they close in an appropriate fashion. In fact, those American refrigerators to which Adorno refers cannot be closed gently. The author does not, however, offer the thought that a person can comport himself towards his refrigerator in an attitude of robust respect. The 'civilised behaviour' [*Gesittung*] that he finds lacking in the behaviour of people towards their products, can also finally reveal itself in rhythm and timing. (Adorno, one might like to say, underestimated jazz even in this connection). A surplus of freedom on the side of the handling subject and autonomy on the side of the handled object could also be granted to those old refrigerators, which we mourn today, since we now have those that, owing to a lifeless physiognomy, close with a mere slurp.

Apparently obscure examples like this lead directly into Adorno's theory of morals, since they illustrate the point of view that directs his evaluations. It is that notion of a restriction [*Gebundenheit*] of freedom to the autonomy of a personal or functional opponent [*Gegenüber*], for which Adorno borrowed the formulation 'freedom towards the object' from Hegel. This freedom for the Other requires a freedom from the fixation upon particular purposes or functions [*Zwecke*]. "When Hume," so begins aphorism 20 in *Minima Moralia*,

confronting his worldly compatriots, sought to defend epistemological contemplation, the 'pure philosophy' forever in dispute among gentlemen, he used the argument: 'Accuracy is, in every case, advantageous to beauty, and just reasoning to delicate sentiment'. That was itself pragmatic, and yet it contains implicitly and negatively the whole truth about the spirit of practicality. The practical orders of life, while purporting to benefit man, serve in a profit economy to stunt human qualities, and the further they spread the more they sever everything tender. For tenderness between people is nothing other than awareness of the possibility of relations without purpose, something still comfortingly glimpsed by those caught up in purposes.⁷

It may scarcely be an exaggeration to overhear, in the closing sentence, an echo of the explanation of the categorical imperative, in which Kant argues that one should treat oneself and others 'never as *mere* means, but rather *always* and *at the same time* as ends in themselves.' Adorno, however, broad-

ens this precept out—in his interpretation it does not only concern the relationships between people, but also those between people and things. For only in the unity of these moments is it revealed for him, whether the consideration for humans is something more than a tactical manoeuvre, namely in the form of an undivided devotion to the world, that finds its own room to move [*Spielraum*], and which also allows others and the Other a space for movement. This care or devotion [*Zuwendung*] carries in Adorno the title of ‘contemplation’, of which in fact neither Plato nor Aristotle, but rather Hume, of all people, is the progenitor. In the name of this very independently understood notion of contemplation, he criticises the exaggerated activism of previous philosophy, most notably in aphorism 54 of *Minima Moralia*:

The pure deed-action [*Tathandlung*] is violation projected onto the starry sky above us. But in the long, contemplative look that fully discloses people and things, the urge toward the object is always broken, reflected. Contemplation without violence, the source of all the happiness of truth, is connected with the fact that the observer does not absorb the object into himself: distanced nearness.⁸

In this idea of contemplation there lies not only a broadening of Kantian, but also of Hegelian, ethics—recognition is thought of here as a relationship, in which ‘people and things first unfold.’ This tripartite recognition—between people and in the countenance of things—is the medium of an unreserved receptiveness, which for Adorno forms the centre of a moral attitude. This receptiveness can only be possessed by he who, in the possession of self and the world, finds distance from the very goal of possession—he who wins time and space for ‘the long look of contemplation’. The ‘unfolding’ of people and things that becomes possible here, eludes common classification. It is equally a theoretical, ethical and aesthetic unfolding. In this unfolding a recognition of the particular is made possible, which, at the same time regards it with respect and allows it to come into appearance in the fullness of its presence. The ‘happiness of truth’ of which Adorno speaks, is the condition of a recognition that does not cover its objects with concepts, but rather speaks to them in such a way that their individual constitution can be received. This happiness of truth is therefore closely bound up with what happiness *in* truth is—comportment towards an opponent, in which both sides can conduct themselves freely towards one another. ‘Contemplation’ is Adorno’s name

for a praxis by which one is open to the other, and yet can let the other be. In such purpose-free connections to the Other and to others, Adorno sees the 'kernel of experience', which motivates and carries his critique of the condition of modern societies. These connections bring into effect possibilities, the unfolding of which is systematically taken away through the arrangement and administration [*Einrichtung*] of the human world.

From his youthful years onwards, Adorno repeatedly emphasised that freedom and happiness, morality and justice, indeed the entire individual and social good under the conditions of the present, could only be characterised negatively. Only in their inverted forms were they susceptible to recognition. This, however, represents a spectacular self-deception. For Adorno's ethics radically acquire their point of departure from *positive* and above all from *radically* positive experiences. In this connection, the Proustian and Benjaminian motif of filled and fulfilled [*erfüllten*] time exerts a powerful influence. The centre of gravity of Adorno's entire philosophy is a search for conditions of non-instrumental conduct, which describe non-compulsive modes of subjective and inter-subjective self-existence. It thus concerns itself with situations that can, in themselves, be willingly affirmed, since they are no longer mere means toward the acquisition of other, putatively better, situations. Within these opportunities, it is possible for subjects to spare time for the moment and therefore to be free in the living present. They are placed in a position to move from the mere awareness of their subjective interests to a broader awareness of the world. These conditions are, for Adorno, everything other than Utopian. They exist in the middle of the 'administered world'. They can be experienced in reality, however obstructed their orienting powers may be. It is these 'traces and splinters', as they are called in the opening lecture of 1931, which provide the hope of at one time coming to a 'right and just reality.'⁹

However, Adorno's defence of contemplative conduct is accompanied by an equally radical critique of it. This critique concerns all established forms of a purely theoretical consideration. "The introverted thought architect dwells behind the moon that is taken over by the extroverted technicians" he notes sarcastically in *Negative Dialectics*.¹⁰ The closing sentence of his essay on *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* reads: "The critical spirit is no match for reification and objectification [*Verdinglichung*] so long as it remains by itself in self-

sufficient contemplation.”¹¹ This critique aims at every form of contemplation that attempts to establish itself as a special sphere separate from societal praxis. *Negative Dialectics* dates the development of this error back to antiquity:

To this day the trouble with contemplation—with the contemplation that contents itself this side of practice, as Aristotle was the first to develop it as *summum bonum*—has been that its very indifference to the task of changing the world made it a piece of obtuse practice, a method and an instrumentality.¹²

Contemplation proceeds in an instrumental fashion, insofar as it seeks to establish a distance from the compulsions of the other forms of praxis, compulsions that—as is the case with modern academic life—tacitly have their influence on it. It narrows its view, in order to escape the predominant and prevailing narrowing of views. In this way it becomes the opposite of the contemplative conduct that Adorno, since *Minima Moralia*, erects as the standard of all praxis. When, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno states that “happiness would be above all praxis,”¹³ he means that one may speak of successful praxis, in the strict sense of the term, only when human action and inaction is executed primarily as activity undertaken for its own sake [*selbstzweckhafte Tätigkeit*], rather than primarily as the pursuit of purpose. In genuine praxis the dichotomy of praxis and contemplation would be overcome; contemplation would become the epitome of praxis. Its *telos*, as it is expressed with reference to Marx in *Negative Dialectics*, would be “the abolition of the primacy of practice in the form that had prevailed in bourgeois society. It would be possible to have contemplation without inhumanity.”¹⁴

This seems to be a real alternative to Jürgen Habermas’ theory of recognition. In Habermas’ theory, recognition is the result of social coordination and cooperation achieved along rational lines. The non-compulsive exchange of arguments, the reciprocal development of respect and esteem as well as the establishment and institutionalisation of universal rights are regarded here as the medium and standard of emancipation. From Adorno’s extreme angle of vision, however, these notions remain within the sphere of instrumental action. They are merely about inter-subjective self-preservation—and therefore about how subjects can ensure for themselves mutual respect. A free life for Adorno, however, cannot consist of modes of conduct that are good *for*

something, but only in those that are *in themselves the good*, since they perform, through solitary or mutual awareness, worthwhile life possibilities. In the field of Critical Theory, Axel Honneth has in his recent work on love and friendship, turned towards relationships in which one-sided or reciprocal recognition is not conceptualised primarily as an obligation.¹⁵ But Adorno's position is even more uncompromising. He does not want to amend neglected moments with an ethics of contractual or communicative exchange, but rather to develop the normativity of conduct out of situations beyond barter and exchange. Consequently, moments of contemplation, rather than of cooperation and communication, provide him with a correct basic model for praxis.

The pursuit of this program, however, involves contortions that can only in part be attributed to the author's literary art of exaggeration. The model of contemplation in Adorno is always opposed to the model of production, the latter of which he sees as having marked modern life-relations in every respect. With this schematic opposition, however, his theory reproduces the very dualism between results- and performance-oriented activities that it claims to surmount. It is also only barely plausible to make the extreme case of activity performed purely for its own sake [*Selbstzweckhaftigkeit*] into the governing criterion for meaningful praxis; in this way the concept of fulfilment falls into contradiction with that of human activity which, even when performance-oriented, remains intention-laden and therefore results-oriented.

In many passages, Adorno gives way to a purism of contemplation, a purism that binds contemplation to situations of reflection and therefore to traditionally understood theoretical behaviour in precisely a way that is not permissible within the confines of a contemplative ethics. Above all, this purism makes itself apparent in the blind utopias that are found scattered all throughout Adorno. In a free society there would thus be need for neither art nor philosophy, whose energies would have wandered into a fantastic everyday that would no longer require mutation [*Brechung*] and disruption. "Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled," as it is at one point expressed in *Negative Dialectics*—which admittedly may also be equated with the 'quenching' of thought *per se*.¹⁶ Again and again Adorno outlines static miniatures (of which aphorism 100 of *Minima Moralia*, titled *Sur l'eau*, is only the most famous), in which there remains no space whatsoever for the concerns and prospects of eternal existence, for the play of

expectation and disappointment. Preferable to have no contemplation at all, rather than contemplation that promises completely contented happiness.

These wrong turns open out in all directions where, instead of trusting its corrective power, Adorno elevates contemplative awareness to an all-encompassing ideal. In correct usage, the concept of contemplative freedom, on the one hand, formulates a wide-reaching standard for judging individual and social practices. It allows for an examination of the extent to which these practices can *also* be carried out for their own sakes—to what extent they allow for postures of a non-instrumental receptiveness. On the other hand, purely contemplative praxis loses its dominating role; it becomes a bare, and perhaps even unlikely borderline case [*Grenzfall*]. With these modifications, the whole picture changes. No longer does contemplation appear to be an exclusive mode of behaviour, charged with the task of stepping, on some distant day, into the place of previous practices. It appears, on the contrary, to be a mode of conduct that can be *included* in all remaining praxis. It shows itself to be a *dimension* of conduct that can manifest itself in all areas. The general norm decrees, then, that individual conduct as well as the institutions of society clear the way as widely as possible for a contemplative consideration of others and of the Other. This norm can be fulfilled and injured everywhere, in science and in politics, in work and in sport, in the public as well as the private realm. Likewise, the nonsensical opposition between communication and contemplation sublates itself; communications can be classified according to the room for movement that they afford to their parties. In general, an unworldly turning away from instrumental and strategic behaviour must no longer be preached; rather, the inner quality of modes of conduct in any field can move to the centre of social critique. ‘Production’ and ‘contemplation’ must no longer be understood as opposites.

Only in this liberalisation do contemplative ethics win a clear contour. They emerge from the experience of a freedom of being for others and for the Other that is lived through for its own sake. The subjects of these experiences become familiar with situations that can give to their wider conduct a normative direction. These situations have an *internal* value in that something *of* value is experienced within them—the possibility of encountering one another in spontaneous awareness. That which is experienced as meaningful in this way is not only something that is of worth for me or for you; equally, familiarity

with this type of situation is *in general* worthwhile for all subjects. What is experienced as a moment of *filled and fulfilled* [erfüllter] time is likewise experienced as filled and fulfilled *time*: as the *individual* realisation of a *universally* favourable mode of being. This unity between subjective and objective value is the key issue in the ethics of Adorno. From the analysis of these experiences it wins a concept of normative motives that can lead the conduct of autonomous subjects. The issue of awareness is ascribed a fundamental value, which forms the basis for all further judgments.

In this way it becomes intelligible to what extent an alternative ethics is involved here. It differs from others not so much in its consequences, but mainly in its opening moves. In its reconstruction of a many-sided receptiveness, its point of departure is a free and liberal intending [*freizügiges Wollen*]. This ethics focuses on situations that can be affirmed regardless of any extraneous justification. The demands and obligations of an Ought arise, in this consideration, only out of the allegiance to episodes from the experience of an unconstrained being. These episodes, however, must be recognised in their corrective significance, and may not be reinterpreted into an anticipation of paradisiacal conditions. They are possibilities that, all going well, lay within the *reach* of individual and social reality. Understood in this way, situations of fulfilled time for once are not the imaginary *telos* but rather the phenomenal ground of ethics.

On this ground Adorno does not move alone. Proust and Benjamin have preceded him, and related motives emerge in Heidegger and Foucault, albeit with considerable distortions. But the most important forerunner is Nietzsche. "It is very important that you should not misunderstand me," announces Adorno to the public at the end of his lecture series on morals, "it is not at all my intention here to pick on Nietzsche [*auf Nietzsche herumzuhacken*] since, to tell the truth, of all the so-called great philosophers I owe him by far the greatest debt—more even than to Hegel."¹⁷ Adorno shares with Nietzsche the refusal to erect an ethics according to constraints of any particular type. A free existence should be the beginning of ethics. This is a daring and perhaps even eccentric thought. But it points along a path of which one would like to know how far it can be followed without crashing. Why not, for once, begin an ethics in the intensity of awareness?

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Notes

- ¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, London, New Left Books, 1974, p. 18.
- ² Theodor W. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie in Nachgelassene Schriften*, Vol. 6, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996, p. 251, (translated by A. Nicholls).
- ³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Lecture Seventeen," *Problems of Moral Philosophy* trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p. 169, (translation altered by A. Nicholls).
- ⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholzen, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 8, (translation altered by A. Nicholls).
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 40. (translation altered by A. Nicholls).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90. (translation altered by A. Nicholls).
- ⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Die Aktualität der Philosophie," *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 325, (translated by A. Nicholls).
- ¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, New York, Seabury Press, 1979, p. 3.
- ¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," "Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 8, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 30, (translated by A. Nicholls).
- ¹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 244.
- ¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 26, (translated by A. Nicholls).
- ¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 244.
- ¹⁵ Axel Honneth, Liebe; ders., Liebe und Moral, in *Merkur* 52/1998, 519-525 u. 1155-1161.
- ¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 207.
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Robert Sinnerbrink

Recognitive Freedom: Hegel and the Problem of Recognition

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theme of recognition in Hegel's account of self-consciousness, suggesting that there are unresolved difficulties with the relationship between the normative sense of mutual recognition and phenomenological cases of unequal recognition. Recent readings of Hegel deal with this problem by positing an implicit distinction between an 'ontological' sense of recognition as a precondition for autonomous subjectivity, and a 'normative' sense of recognition as embodied in rational social and political institutions. Drawing on recent work by Robert Pippin and Axel Honneth, I argue that Hegel's conception of rational freedom provides the key to grasping the relationship between the ontological and normative senses of recognition. Recognitive freedom provides a way of appropriating Hegel's theory of recognition for contemporary social philosophy.

KEYWORDS: recognition, rational freedom, intersubjectivity, Hegel, social philosophy

In his landmark 1992 study on recognition in Hegel and Fichte, Robert R. Williams observed that the theme of recognition has remained largely unrecognised in English-language Hegel scholarship.¹ Today, however, we could say that situation has been reversed. The theme of recognition now enjoys extensive

acknowledgment as the centrepiece of a number of contemporary 'non-metaphysical' interpretations of Hegel.² Moreover, a broad consensus exists that Hegel is perhaps *the* decisive philosophical figure in the theorisation of recognition in recent social philosophy.³ This significance of the Hegelian theme of recognition for contemporary social philosophy suggests that it might be timely to submit the concept of recognition to further critical analysis, and on this basis to propose an interpretative approach to the relationship between Hegelian freedom and mutual recognition.

The following discussion therefore has a twofold aim: to analyse critically the theme of recognition in Hegel's account of self-consciousness, and to suggest that there are unresolved difficulties in Hegel's account of the relationship between the normative sense of mutual recognition and the phenomenological cases of unequal recognition. Recent readings of Hegel deal with this problem by positing an implicit distinction between an 'ontological' sense of recognition as a precondition for the development of autonomous subjectivity, and a 'normative' sense of recognition as ideally articulated in the rational ethico-political institutions of modernity. I want to consider the relationship between these distinct but related senses of recognition, drawing on the recent work of Robert Pippin and Axel Honneth,⁴ and to argue that Hegel's conception of rational freedom provides the key to grasping the relationship between the ontological and normative senses of recognition. Hegel's 'original idea', I suggest, is to show that the conditions for the development of autonomous subjectivity include not only the relations of mutual recognition between social agents but also the normative context of social practices and political institutions that makes such intersubjective relationships between social agents possible.

What is Hegelian *Anerkennung*?

One of the most striking things about Hegel's use of the concept of recognition is that it is not at all given the kind of explicit analysis that such an important concept would seem to deserve. In this regard, as Robert Williams observes, recognition appears to be an *operative* rather than a *thematic* concept in Hegel's *Phenomenology*: it is deployed in Hegel's phenomenological exposition but it is never made explicitly thematic.⁵ Given the profound influ-

ence of Hegel's *Phenomenology* on later appropriations of the concept of recognition, I want to explore how it is presented in the *locus classicus*: the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on Self-Consciousness entitled "The Truth of Self-Certainty." In particular, I want to analyse Hegel's account of the relationship between the Concept of recognition (as presented to 'us' as phenomenological observers) and the phenomenological experience of recognition, which typically takes the form of unequal recognition relations, from the famous dialectic between master and slave to the alienated experience of the 'unhappy consciousness'.

My guiding question is simple: how are we to understand the relationship between reciprocal and non-reciprocal recognition? The former is taken to be the paradigm case of recognition, while the latter is a deficient mode of recognition. Yet there is another sense in which recognition, for Hegel, is presented as *constitutive* of the very concept of self-consciousness: the famous opening sentence of the first paragraph of Section A, "Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness" reads: "Self-consciousness exists *in and for itself* through the fact that it exists in and for itself for another; that is, it exists only as recognised."⁶ So even deficient or unequal recognition—as we find in the famous dialectic of independent and dependent consciousness—must presuppose mutual or reciprocal recognition at some more fundamental level. As we shall see, this is the interpretative strategy adopted by most recent commentators (such as Williams and Redding). It is also a strategy that I shall question in respect of its coherence within Hegel's phenomenological exposition.

Desire and the Truth of Self-Certainty

The first problem is to establish how we arrive at the concept of recognition, which is not explicitly mentioned until the opening paragraph (§178) of Section A. "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage." Indeed, paragraphs 166-177 play a crucial yet obscure role in the 'deduction' of the Concept of recognition and its significance for the experiences of self-consciousness. Most interpretations regard this section as a straightforward description of the experience of desiring self-consciousness, which affirms its self-certainty by consuming and assimilating various living objects of desire. This account of desiring self-consciousness then prepares

for the introduction of the Concept of self-consciousness defined by mutual recognition: the truth of desiring self-consciousness, and its unstable attempts at establishing self-certainty, lies in being recognised by another (desiring) self-consciousness: “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*”⁷

At this point in the phenomenological exposition, according to Hegel, the experience of desire is concluded: we now have before us the Concept [*Begriff*] of self-consciousness. Like all Hegelian *Begriffe*, the Concept of self-consciousness consists of a threefold relation between universal, particular, and individual aspects; such is the case in ¶176, which points forward to the Concept of *Geist*.

This Concept of self-consciousness is only completed in these three moments: (a) the pure, undifferentiated ‘I’ is its first immediate object. (b) But this immediacy is itself an absolute mediation; it is only as a supersession of the independent object, or it is Desire [*Begierde*]. The satisfaction of Desire is, to be sure, the reflection of self-consciousness into itself, or is the certainty that has become truth. (c) But the truth of this certainty is really a doubled reflection, the doubling [*Verdopplung*] of self-consciousness.⁸

This enigmatic paragraph is significant for a number of reasons. First, this Concept of self-consciousness is presented ‘to us’, the phenomenological observers, which raises the vexed question of who ‘we’ are in the *Phenomenology*. Moreover, the three aspects of the Concept of self-consciousness presented to us are not superseded in the subsequent exposition of self-consciousness. Unlike the three moments of consciousness (sense-certainty, perception, and understanding), which were suspended/superseded in the transition to self-consciousness, these three moments of self-consciousness will not be similarly *aufgehoben*, but simply *retained* in the transition from self-consciousness to reason.

Second, the phenomenological exposition has indeed described point (a), the aspect of abstract universality, the Fichtean ‘I = I’ with which the exposition of self-certainty began, as well as point (b), the experience of desiring self-consciousness in which it affirms its self-certainty in the unstable mode of desiring and consuming living objects. However, point (c), the decisive aspect of the Concept of self-consciousness, the movement of ‘doubling’ between

self-consciousness (what Hegel will almost immediately christen the movement of recognition or *Anerkennung*), has *not* been phenomenologically demonstrated at this stage of the exposition. On the contrary, with minimal transitional argument (desiring self-consciousness achieves satisfaction only in relation to another desiring self-consciousness), Hegel goes on to assert that the truth of self-certainty (that is, the ‘falsity’ of the experience of desire) is ‘really’ an intersubjective relationship between mutually recognising self-consciousnesses. The crucial question is: *how do we get from the antagonistic relation between desiring self-consciousnesses to the overcoming of this antagonism through mutual intersubjective recognition?* Answering this question requires a more detailed consideration of Hegel’s exposition of the Concept of recognition, which begins the famous section on the “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness.”

Whatever its argumentative difficulties, it is clear that with this transition from desiring to cognitive self-consciousness we have arrived at a dramatic turning point in the phenomenological exposition. The conclusion of the experience of desire is that genuine satisfaction can be achieved only in *mutual recognition* between self-conscious subjects. The ‘falsity’ of desire is overcome in intersubjective recognition: “A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it.”⁹ As already mentioned, however, this intersubjective moment of self-consciousness—like the moments of abstract universality and particularity of desire—has not been phenomenologically deduced. Rather, it has been *presupposed* as a fixed aspect of the Concept of self-consciousness that anticipates the truth of self-consciousness as Spirit. Consider Hegel’s famous formulation:

Self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much ‘I’ as object. With this, we already have before us the Notion of *Spirit*. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’.¹⁰

In what is virtually the mission statement of contemporary cognitive readings, Hegel claims that we have already attained reciprocal recognition in the

concept of self-consciousness, which will prove to be the Concept of *Geist*: the harmonious recognitive mutuality between individual subjects within a historically situated, communal intersubjectivity, the I that is We and We that is I.

This intersubjective turn, however, has not emerged from the experience of self-consciousness itself. All that Hegel has phenomenologically demonstrated thus far is that the experience of desire points to a ‘doubling’ of self-consciousnesses, at this point still an *antagonistic relation* between desiring self-consciousnesses, who are themselves not yet fully fledged mutually recognising ‘self-consciousnesses’ but only egoistic proto-subjects of desire, immersed in the immediacy of Life. On the contrary, the “experience of what Spirit is”—a speculative unity of mutually recognising self-conscious subjects within communal intersubjectivity—still lies far ahead for consciousness, and will not explicitly emerge until the concluding section on mutual forgiveness in Chapter Six on Spirit (§671). At this point, however, we have not yet seen how self-consciousness has arrived at this intersubjectivity, nor how the reciprocal recognition assumed in the *Concept* of self-consciousness is to be reconciled with its *experience of non-reciprocal recognition*.

Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness

The standard interpretation of Hegel’s concept of recognition in the *Phenomenology* centres on the famous dialectic of the independence and dependence of self-consciousness. Like most of Hegel’s chapters, Section A of Chapter Four apparently begins with a description of the Concept of self-consciousness presented ‘for us’ as phenomenological observers. This introductory exposition of the Concept of recognition is generally understood to span paragraphs 178-184, which concludes with the classic formulation of reciprocal recognition: “They *recognise* themselves as *mutually recognising* one another.”¹¹ To repeat, this description of the recognitive structure of self-consciousness is simply posited as the truth of this failed attempt at establishing self-certainty. It is presupposed as a fixed element of the *Concept* of self-consciousness, which was introduced in terms of the threefold relation between abstract universal ‘I’, the particularity of desire, and the opaque ‘doubling’ between self-consciousnesses.

The latter is now revealed to be identical with the crucial movement of *recognition*, which will prove to be what defines the aspect of *individuality* of self-consciousness. Thus Hegel begins ¶178 by explicitly identifying what was previously named the ‘doubling’ of self-consciousnesses with mutual recognition: “Self-consciousness exists *in and for itself* through the fact that it exists in and for itself for another; that is, it exists only in being recognised [*ein Anerkanntes*].”¹² This statement provides the impetus for numerous recent interpretations that emphasise the decisive role of reciprocal recognition in Hegel’s theory of self-consciousness.¹³ The difficulty is to understand how this exposition of reciprocal recognition, which is supposed to be a necessary condition of self-consciousness as such, fits with the experience of desire, the subsequent ‘life-and-death struggle’, and experience of domination and subjection, all of which are forms of non-reciprocal recognition.

Hegel’s exposition of the Concept of recognition is notoriously difficult. Here I shall reconstruct only the most relevant aspects of his account that shed light on the problem of the relationship between reciprocal and non-reciprocal recognition. The movement of recognition begins with two intending ‘proto-subjects’ confronting each other; each takes the other to be an intentional subject, but in doing so, each also identifies itself as one intending subject among others. Individual self-consciousness has *come out of* itself, that is, ‘identifies’ itself with an other, but at the same time refuses to recognise the other as an intentional being with his/her own point of view. For it can see in the other only a reflection of its own point of view (needs, interests, desires, and so on). This process, Hegel tells us, is fundamentally ambiguous: each intentional subject attempts to supersede the other in order to affirm its independence; but in doing so, the subject also supersedes its *own* self since it also identifies itself with the other.¹⁴ I can objectify myself for myself only by transposing myself into the position of the other for whom I am also an other in turn. This complex relation in which I recognise that I am an other *for* the other is what makes my self-relation at the same time a relation to the other. By recognising its own point of view from the point of view of the other, each subject “thus lets the other again go free” (or implicitly recognises the other as independent).¹⁵

Hegel underlines that this process of recognition is an *interaction between* self-consciousnesses, where the action of one has the *dual significance* of also being

the action of the other.¹⁶ Viewed from the phenomenological observer perspective, recognition always involves the *mutual interaction* between intending subjects: “each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same.”¹⁷ My actions are recognised as actions insofar as they are directed towards a similarly acting and intending subject, whose actions I in turn recognise as similarly directed towards me. Recognition between self-consciousness is an *intersubjective* relation in which self-identity is mediated through the recognitive relationship with the other: “They recognise themselves as *mutually recognising* one another.”¹⁸

The ‘Life-and-Death’ Struggle

The dialectical complexity of mutual recognition, however, is precisely *not* what self-consciousness experiences at this stage. Rather, it undergoes the experience of unequal recognition, a relationship of domination that is (partially and inadequately) resolved, through the intersubjective mediation of the other (the minister or priest), in the experience of the unhappy consciousness. We phenomenological observers must now see how “the process of this pure Concept of recognition, of the doubling of self-consciousness in its oneness, *appears to self-consciousness*.”¹⁹ The first experience will be of a ‘life-and-death struggle’: a confrontation between initially *equal* ‘proto-subjects,’ immersed in the immediacy of Life, each striving to prove its self-certainty against the other. Hegel signals, moreover, that these ‘proto-subjects’ are not yet fully fledged subjects; they have not yet attained that movement of self-relating negativity characterising genuinely independent self-consciousness (which will first emerge in the life-and-death struggle, the encounter with death and finitude).²⁰

The question here is what motivates the life-and-death struggle? Hegel describes how each individual proto-subject asserts its own self-identity by negating the other, where the other is taken to be a mere obstacle confronting the subject, rather than another intentional being with its own point of view. The ‘I’ of each proto-subject of desire is an egoistic self-identity that asserts itself by excluding all otherness, which includes other proto-subjects of desire.²¹ These ‘proto-subjects’ each seek to establish a stable and independent self-identity that is recognised by the other; but in order to do so each must also

show that it is not attached to *Life*. The relation between the protagonists thereby becomes a violent conflict, with each staking its own life in seeking the death of the other. To succeed in destroying the other, however, would be to fail to gain the recognition that was the point of the struggle. What self-consciousness requires is a *determinate negation* that will allow the protagonists to survive their struggle and, eventually, achieve mutual recognition.²² The *outcome* of this life-and-death struggle, however, will be an *unequal recognition* relation between opposing extremes of a *recognising* self-consciousness and a *recognised* self-consciousness.²³

Mastery and Servitude

This first experience teaches self-consciousness that Life is as essential to it as independence. This desired sense of independence dissolves in this encounter with death and finitude in confronting another intentional being. What emerges instead is a pure self-consciousness that exists merely *for-itself* (the independent consciousness), and a 'reified' consciousness that exists solely *for-another* (the dependent consciousness). The master is an intentional subject who disregards the other's intentionality, while the slave is a subject who sets aside his own point of view, subordinating himself to the independent self-certainty of the master. The primary experience of self-consciousness, therefore, is one of *domination and subjection*, temporarily 'stabilised' in the primitive social relation of non-reciprocal recognition relation between *master* and *slave*.²⁴

The problem confronting us here is quite simple: what of the relation between the reciprocal recognition that is a condition of the constitution of self-consciousness, and the non-reciprocal recognition characterising the experience of domination and alienation? This question becomes acute when we consider that the experience of domination and subjection is explicitly described as an extreme *polarity* between a purely recognising consciousness (the slave) and a purely recognised one (the master). The moment of reciprocal recognition is lacking, namely that what the master does to the other (make him dependent) he also does to himself, and what the slave does to himself (recognise his dependence) he also does to the other.²⁵ But Hegel has already shown that recognition is a reciprocal relation in which action is always already an interaction between mutually recognising subjects: mutual recognition is a

necessary moment or aspect of the Concept of self-consciousness, hence non-reciprocal recognition seems to directly contradict this condition of self-consciousness.

Ontological and Normative Recognition

The simplest interpretative response is to say that Hegel has merely distinguished between the Concept of recognition and its deficient realisation in experience: the paradigmatic case of recognition is fully mutual and reciprocal recognition but this Concept of recognition is only imperfectly realised in the various cases of domination and subjection that Hegel analyses. The non-reciprocal recognition evident in these experiences of self-consciousness presupposes a more basic sense of mutual recognition, one that is discernible only for us as phenomenological observers but not for the protagonists themselves.

Such an interpretation is presented by Robert Williams in his two studies of Hegelian recognition.²⁶ Drawing on Husserlian terminology, Williams presents Hegel's analysis as divided into an *eidetics* of recognition, Hegel's "exposition of the dialectical development of the concept [of recognition] in itself (or for us)";²⁷ and an *empirics* of recognition, the determinate empirical realisation of the concept of recognition, for example in the life-and-death struggle and experience of mastery and servitude. This neatly accounts for the reciprocal recognition required for the constitution of self-consciousness (the Concept of self-consciousness), and the non-reciprocal recognition constitutive of the empirical-phenomenological experience of self-consciousness.

The eidetics of recognition, according to Williams, "is an analysis of what happens when a self-consciousness (which is the opposite of itself) encounters another self-consciousness (also the opposite of itself)."²⁸ This complex, doubled movement of recognition, on Williams' reading, involves three aspects:

- 1) "abstract parochial universality," in which each consciousness presumes to be universal but assumes "a universality that excludes all difference, otherness, and relation";
- 2) opposition between particulars, in which there is a loss of self resulting from the discovery that the self is not universal but a particular self opposed to another particular self; and

- 3) “emergent concrete, i.e. mediated universality,” a return to self in which “the original self-identity is enlarged and enriched by the other’s recognition,” a mutual releasement in which each allows the other to go free.²⁹

With this third phase of mutual recognition, concrete universality in which the self finds its realisation in the other, we arrive at a communicative freedom or reconciliation between self and other.

What Williams calls the empirics of recognition presents the determinate realisation of the concept of recognition, which initially takes the negative form of unequal recognition relations. Indeed, the life-and-death struggle and experience of mastery and servitude, Williams claims, “represent self-recognition in other in the negative mode of mutual exclusion,” which is not a genuine ‘realisation’ of the concept of recognition so much as “its suppression or perversion.”³⁰ What is essential in the experience of mastery and servitude, on Williams’ interpretation, is that the two opposing protagonists actually share an underlying, more primitive form of reciprocal recognition that makes possible their unequal relation of domination and subjection.

At the same time, Williams claims that the eidetics of recognition “suggest that conflict of some sort is an essential structural feature of recognition.”³¹ What, then, do we make of Williams’ previous claim that the experience of conflict in unequal recognition is a ‘perversion’ of the concept of recognition proper? Is conflict a necessary eidetic feature of *all recognition*, whether reciprocal or non-reciprocal? Or is conflict a feature only of *non-reciprocal recognition*, which remains stuck, so to speak, at phases one and two of the process of recognition but fails to attain phase three of concrete universality and freedom? Williams even seems to revoke his primary claim that unequal recognition presupposes reciprocal recognition—that what the master does to the slave he ultimately does to himself—by talking of ‘general correlativity’ (rather than reciprocity) between master and slave in their relation of unequal recognition.

Hegel observes that master/slave is a deficient mode of the concept of recognition, that self-destructs and falls apart from its own internal incoherence. Nevertheless, it should be carefully noted that the deficiency does not consist simply in absence of reciprocity. While Hegel characterizes master/slave as an unequal and one-sided form of recognition, it still exhibits a general

correlativity, if not reciprocity. Such correlativity underlies the reversal of the *Gestalten*.³²

For Williams, it is this general correlation between intentional beings recognising each other as intentional beings that underlies the dialectical reversals in the unequal recognition relation between master and slave. This correlative reciprocity is “ontological and constitutive,” Williams argues, and should be distinguished from reciprocal recognition and its suppression in the master/slave relationship.³³ But this claim seems to undermine the force of the concept of recognition, equating a ‘general correlativity’ between intending subjects with a kind of *minimal* recognition that will allow us to say that unequal recognition presupposes reciprocal recognition. That the conflicting subjects are in some sense ‘correlated’, however, seems a truism; but this does not mean that conflict can be reduced to an underlying ‘general correlativity’.³⁴

The problem, as I noted earlier, is that Williams claims that unequal recognition, hence conflict and struggle, is a ‘perversion’ of the Concept of self-consciousness proper, with its constitutive moment of reciprocal recognition. On the other hand, he acknowledges that conflict or struggle is an unavoidable aspect, an ‘essential structural feature,’ of the intersubjective relationship between intentional subjects. Conflict is both essential to, and a perversion of, the recognitive relationship. To resolve this difficulty, Williams shifts from marking a clear distinction between a presupposed reciprocal recognition that makes possible unequal recognition to asserting a ‘general correlativity’ between recognising subjects, whether they be engaged in domination relations or involved in mutual releasement.

A more convincing interpretative solution to this problem can be found in Paul Redding’s recent study, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*. Redding argues that we must presuppose a ‘hermeneutic’ sense of recognition that implies taking the other as another intentional and linguistic subject as a precondition of any intentional action. This is Hegel’s deeper point about the reciprocity involved in recognitive relations between intending subjects, and provides the intersubjective basis for whatever deficient forms of recognition may occur in the experience of self-consciousness. On Redding’s reading, ‘the *purely* desiring natural subject,’ embedded in living nature, incorporates the ‘perspectives’ of others only by ‘*actually* incorporating those others *themselves* (and hence

annihilating their 'points of view').³⁵ In the system of spirit, on the other hand, 'individuals can 'idealise' others—that is, know them *as* intentional beings—can *ideally* incorporate the viewpoints of those others into their *own* points of view.'³⁶

For Redding, this hermeneutic taking of others as intentional beings of such-and-such a kind (friend, enemy, and so on) provides a way of understanding "how the doubly structured intentionality of true self-consciousness will be attained."³⁷ Thus, in the relationship between natural desiring subjects, each implicitly recognises its own intentionality (to kill the other) reflected back by the other's intentional behaviour (to kill me). But each intentional subject also recognises that the particular intention (to do me harm) is not simply that individual's own *particular* intention, but an intention *in general* (a 'universal') to kill whoever his adversary might be (who happens to be me)—an intention in general that my adversary and I both share. This mutual recognising of each other as intentional subjects, with a shared but inverted intentionality—we both aim to kill each other, but I aim to preserve my life by ending yours, while you aim to preserve your life by ending mine—is thus a precondition of the violent struggle for recognition evinced in the experience of self-consciousness.

One of the problems Redding's interpretation avoids is a vicious circularity in the account of recognition and its role in the constitution of self-consciousness. This circularity was one of the problems afflicting Alexandre Kojève's enormously influential interpretation of the struggle for recognition, where recognition appears both as the *necessary condition* for self-consciousness and as a *goal or aim* of the struggle between self-conscious subjects desiring recognition. Once again we encounter the distinction between an ontological sense of recognition and the normative sense, where this distinction is blurred such that the normative sense is equated with the ontological sense of recognition. The result, as Stanley Rosen has noted, is a genetic account of the formation of self-consciousness that at the same time presupposes the prior existence of self-consciousness.³⁸ The way out of this impasse, according to Redding, is through a non-metaphysical, hermeneutic interpretation of the implicitly intersubjective character of the mutual recognition between intentional social and linguistic beings. Such a reading avoids the difficulties in the Kojèveian 'anthropological' reading of recognition but also avoids

lumbering Hegel with a dogmatic metaphysical conception of *Geist* as a cosmic super-subject that obliterates all otherness.

In this respect, Robert Williams' interpretation, Redding observes, has the virtue of showing how Hegelian recognition preserves the other, recognises difference and alterity, and culminates in a mutual releasement (recalling the *Gelassenheit* of Meister Eckhart and Martin Heidegger).³⁹ Redding even goes so far as to claim that this mutual releasement, most evident in the Hegelian account of love and religious forgiveness, is also present, in a sense, in the struggle for recognition. The combatants are forced to realise that their subjective viewpoints on the world are not absolute; they are forced not only to recognise that they inhabit a world with others but "to recognise the other as an intentional subject for whom *it* is a direct object," and that "this is an intentionality [each combatant itself] could never directly have."⁴⁰ Consequently, Redding contends, we can read Hegel as claiming that "the element of releasement is a structural feature of acknowledgement *per se*," which implies, contra Gadamer, that there is a genuine dialogical intersubjectivity to be found in Hegel's thought.⁴¹ This means, I take it, that even in the deficient or unequal recognition relationship of domination there is an implicit mutual recognition, a potential intersubjective releasement at play.

This is a very striking interpretative proposal, although counter-intuitive as an account of the underlying basis of the struggle for recognition. For the master/slave relation is characterised precisely by its lack of reciprocity, a confrontation between two extremes of consciousness, where one is solely recognising, the other solely recognised. There does not seem, on the face of it, any way to show an implicit releasement within the master/slave relation, particularly if we consider that the resolution of this unequal recognition will be through the self-mastery of stoicism, the self-undermining freedom of scepticism, and the self-divided alienation of the unhappy consciousness. Redding's response, as I understand it, is to point to the role of *language* in articulating this implicit releasement in the structure of recognition: the implicit recognition between desiring and intentional subjects is also recognition of each as a *linguistic subject* capable of communicative freedom.⁴² Even in the unequal recognitive relation between master and slave, we must presuppose a mutual recognition of each as a linguistic subject: "the production of a communicative effect presupposes the recognition by the hearer of the speaker's inten-

tion,⁴³ even if that means issuing commands to someone who understands and obeys them.

Assuming that we accept this point about the implicit recognition involved in taking another as a linguistic subject, this does not clarify how even unequal recognition nonetheless presupposes an implicit releasement between these communicatively interacting subjects. After all, it is not the linguistic or communicative interaction between master and slave that provides the impetus for the transformation of their relationship of domination and subjection. Rather, it is the encounter with finitude (fear of death), the mastery and sublimation of desire, and above all the social activity of work or labour that will eventually transfigure the non-reciprocal domination relation into the socially objectified relations of mutual recognition in the social and political institutions of the modern state. Although the importance of work is briefly indicated,⁴⁴ these crucial elements of negativity—the “objectification” of freedom experienced in the fear of death, and the recognition of finitude without which labour becomes mere pragmatic skill, a “freedom still enmeshed in servitude”⁴⁵—are underplayed in Redding’s ‘hermeneutic’ reading of recognition.

For both Williams and Redding, in sum, the unequal recognition evinced in the life-and-death struggle and master/slave relationship presupposes a deeper level or intersubjective or hermeneutic recognition that makes possible these non-reciprocal forms of recognition. This implicit reciprocal recognition—enacted through the hermeneutic ‘taking’ of another subject as an intentional, desiring, and linguistic being—also provides the source for the emancipatory potential of the concept of recognition, whose *telos* is ultimately a mutual releasement, acknowledgment of difference, or communicative freedom.

The problem is that is not clear, on these readings, how the minimal ontological sense of recognition presupposed in any kind of practical interaction necessarily provides a basis for the normative claims made for reciprocal recognition in the interpersonal, social, and political spheres. Even if we say that a relation of domination presupposes an implicit reciprocity, insofar as this is a relationship established between mutually recognising intentional and linguistic subjects, this does not imply that this implicit sense of recognition

should be identified with the normative sense of mutual recognition found in ethical relations or social institutions. If such implicit reciprocity is equally presupposed in relations of domination and subjection as in the achievement of mutual forgiveness, then that suggests that this implicit recognition does not give us a satisfactory normative criterion to distinguish between these very different kinds of recognitive relationship.

I therefore suggest that we should distinguish between the *ontological sense* of recognition, which as both Williams and Redding point out is a precondition for social interaction, and the stronger, explicitly *normative sense* of recognition, which finds its articulation both in ethical relations as well as social and political institutions. Expressed schematically, the distinction is between:

- a) the minimal ontological sense of recognition presupposed by the Concept of self-consciousness (what Hegel calls the 'doubling of self-consciousness'), which is constitutive of being an intentional subject; and
- b) the explicitly normative sense of recognition as a socially objectified relation between individual subjects mediated by the intersubjective context of rational social and political institutions.

To be sure, the minimal ontological sense of recognition is a precondition for the fully developed sense of normative recognition, but they should not for that reason be identified as though they signified the same type of relation. The former is the precondition for any intentional interaction, whether that involves domination of, or reconciliation with, another subject. The latter is a normative demand whose *telos* is that of fully realised freedom, or mutual releasement, that becomes possible in principle, so Hegel contends, at the 'end of history'—in the achieved reconciliation between universality and particularity within the self-reforming institutions of modernity. To recapitulate my earlier analysis, Hegel demonstrates a), the aspect of minimal ontological recognition as an essential aspect of the Concept of self-consciousness (the 'doubling' of self-consciousness); but then implies that a) is precondition for b), to the normative sense of recognition as the *telos* of the phenomenological exposition, and indeed to the realisation of freedom in modernity as the *telos* of historical progress.

Rational Freedom and Mutual Recognition

This analysis of the two senses of recognition at play in the Hegelian account of the experience of self-consciousness raises an obvious question: what, then, is the relationship between ontological and normative senses of recognition? To answer this question requires understanding Hegelian recognition, as Robert Pippin has recently argued, as addressing the question of rational freedom in modernity.⁴⁶ On Pippin's reading, Hegel's account of recognition is not primarily "a comprehensive transcendental theory about self-awareness," nor an account of "the possibility of *any* self-relation," nor "directly a theory of institutions or social justice."⁴⁷ In this respect, Pippin is challenging approaches to Hegel's theory of recognition that argue for an *a priori intersubjectivism*, a view criticised, for example, by Dieter Henrich in his recent debate with Jürgen Habermas.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Pippin is also questioning the claim, articulated by Axel Honneth, that a reconstructed Hegelian theory of recognition *does* present the foundations for a normative theory of social justice.⁴⁹ Rather, for Pippin, the theory of recognition, including both reciprocal and non-reciprocal varieties, is to be understood as Hegel's answer to the question concerning "nature and the very possibility of freedom."⁵⁰

In this final section, I want to examine Pippin's reading, showing that while this 'Kantian' approach does capture the significance of Hegel's account of recognition as explaining the possibility of rational freedom, for the very same reason this account *does* point, as Honneth argues, to the foundations for a normative theory of social justice in modernity. And this is precisely because it offers a theory outlining the way rational freedom presupposes mutual recognition articulated at the level of social practices and political institutions. Such is Honneth's approach in his recent attempt at a 'reactualisation' of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which aims "to develop general principles of justice wherein subjects would be able to regard one another's freedom to be a precondition of their own individual self-realisation."⁵¹ Indeed, this way of understanding recognition as describing the concrete conditions for the possibility of rational freedom in modernity articulates precisely the ontological and normative senses of recognition that I outlined above.

As Pippin observes, however, any succinct discussion of Hegelian concepts inevitably raises the issue of the role of Hegel's speculative-logical system in

understanding the meaning of particular concepts or analyses. This is especially so with Hegel's speculative notion of freedom, which not only raises the question of the plausibility of Hegel's system but also as the issue of understanding the relation between Nature and Spirit. For our purposes, however, Pippin identifies four features of Hegel's conception of freedom that are essential for even the most basic appropriation of his thought.

First, Hegel rejects any voluntarist account of freedom. Freedom is not a causal power possessed by individuals to initiate action independent of antecedent causal conditions. Rather, freedom involves being in a self-regarding and mutually related state with others involving various socially recognised deeds and practices. Such deeds and projects have to be able to be counted as mine, as being willed by me, within the concrete circumstances of social interaction.⁵²

Second, this state of being in the right self- and other-relation must be *rational* or universal; it is a state of being free because I am determined by reason rather than contingent desires or impulses or strategic objectives. Freedom, in this sense, is *normative* rather than a matter of arbitrary will or instrumental desires.⁵³

Third, rational freedom, Pippin argues, is the result of "internalisations and of social interactions and mutual commitments among subjects developed over time within a social community."⁵⁴ Hegel thus appropriates the Fichtean *Aufforderung*, the 'challenge' or 'summons' by the Other who prompts me to transform my desires into specific *claims* to be recognised by others, whose claims I must recognise universally in turn. However, rather than Fichte's quasi-Hobbesian state of mutual restriction of the negative freedom of subjects, Hegel develops a model of the 'struggle for recognition' that finds particular expression in his early Jena manuscripts.⁵⁵ In his mature work, according to Pippin, Hegel will count all normative claims as attempting to secure a mutuality of recognition, where this mutual recognition is not a restriction on my (negative) liberty but rather a positive condition of my rational agency.

Fourth, Hegel's account of freedom is not simply an 'objective' social theory of freedom. I must be able to take a subjective attitude towards my intentions and reasons, but this relation is 'expressive' rather than causal (as in

Hegel's example of the artist expressing his/her intention adequately in the work of art).⁵⁶ The action must express my intentions, must express who I am, be rationally undertaken (not arbitrary), and socially recognised by others. When these criteria are satisfied, I am in a social state of recognising and being recognised; this state of being recognised is being rationally free, an essential state articulating my self-relation with my relation to others.⁵⁷ It is a state of "being with myself in an other" established through relations of mutual recognition.

Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's 'state' theory of freedom (being rationally free presupposes being mutually recognised) provides a helpful way of understanding the significance of Hegelian recognition for contemporary social philosophy. For it describes an intersubjective state, a state of *Geist* or spirit, that makes being socially recognised essential for the achievement of rational freedom. Within modernity, we can no longer appeal to the 'heart', 'positive authority', or even matter of fact solidarity (for example, nationalist sentiment) for authoritative justification of our actions.⁵⁸ Rather, these forms of justification must be rationally justified, have a rational content, such that we come to see ourselves as having rational autonomy. As Hegel puts it in *The Philosophy of Right*:

When I will what is rational, I act not as a particular individual, but in accordance with the concepts of ethics in general (*nach den Begriffen der Sittlichkeit*); in an ethical act, I vindicate not myself but the thing (*die Sache*).⁵⁹

This means, for Hegel, that when we are in a state of rational freedom, we do not will simply by following our natural impulses or particular desires, but will in accordance with rationally grounded norms structuring the intersubjective context of our ethical and political community. Human beings can transcend their natural inclinations and impulses, can take each other as reason-givers capable of acting according to collectively shared and binding norms; but this form of rational freedom is a social and historical achievement rather than the exercise of some natural causal capacity.

Pippin puts the point very acutely, emphasising the non-metaphysical character of the Hegelian theory of rational freedom, for which reciprocal recognition is an essential precondition, both at the level of intersubjective relations

between subjects, and at the level of 'objective spirit,' the normative context of social and political institutions:

being a free agent consists in being recognised as one, and one can be so recognised only if the other's recognition is freely given; and this effectively means only if I recognise the other as a free individual.⁶⁰

And further:

one is an agent in being recognised as, responded to as, an agent; one can be so recognised if the justifying norms appealed to in the practice of treating each other as agents can actually function within that community as justifying, can be offered and accepted (recognised as) justifying.⁶¹

Here the subjective and objective aspects of intersubjective recognition are brought together: I am a free agent insofar as I am taken to be such by another free agent; and I can be taken to be such (recognised as rationally free) insofar as we engage in social interaction within a historically situated and socially articulated normative context of recognitive relations (what Hegel calls '*Sittlichkeit*' or 'objective spirit').

Hegelian rational freedom, as recognitive freedom, is thus made possible through the intersubjective context of recognitive relations articulated in the normative (ethical) structure of social and political community. Being free is being oneself in the other, where the other refers both to the intersubjective recognitive relation with another subject, but also to the normative context of recognitive relations structuring social and political institutions within modernity. In other words, it is only within the normative context of 'objective spirit'—within the social normativity of modern social and political institutions—that the conditions necessary for the development of the freely willing subject can be established.

We can compare Pippin's account of rational freedom with Honneth's recent reading of the *Philosophy of Right* as Hegel's "attempt at a theory of social justice," that is, as precisely what Pippin claims the Hegelian theory of recognition is not.⁶² But there is no good reason to reject the view that Hegel's theory of recognition, as an account of the conditions for the exercise of rational freedom, can be construed as a social philosophy of justice or a normative

theory of modernity. Pippin himself shows how the theme of recognition is an answer to the question of rational freedom, understood as a kind of self-determination that requires mutual recognition. This sense of freedom as 'being with oneself in the other' presupposes mutual recognition, both between rational subjects and in relation to the normative context of social interactions. And this is certainly compatible with Honneth's reading of the *Philosophy of Right*, which he argues provides "a sketch of a normative theory of those spheres of reciprocal recognition, the preservation of which is constitutive of the moral identity of modern societies."⁶³ Hegel's concept of freedom encompasses the entire ensemble of social, institutional, economic, and political conditions that make possible the complex willing of rational freedom on the part of modern social subjects.

For Honneth, Hegel's task in the *Philosophy of Right* is to perform a critical presentation of the limitations of the atomised conception of the freely willing subject, showing how individualistic conceptions of freedom found in the sphere of 'abstract right' and 'morality' are grounded in the complex normative context of 'ethical life'. The latter articulates the spheres of social and communicative interaction defined by the family, and civil society, which are in turn grounded in the normative structure of the rational political state. In Honneth's 'reactualisation,' Hegel simultaneously provides a 'diagnosis of the age' along with a normative theory of the connection between the spheres of social and political recognition. In this regard, the *Philosophy of Right* sketches a normative theory of modernity from the viewpoint of a rational reconstruction of the conditions necessary for the development of freely willing subjects who will rational freedom.

At the same time, Hegel diagnoses the social pathologies resulting from failed, damaged, or distorted recognitive relations, what Honneth calls the experience of "suffering from indeterminacy."⁶⁴ This includes social experiences of "solitude" or loneliness, "emptiness," and "labouring under a burden,"⁶⁵ that all arise from distortions in the practical self-relations of subjects due to the misapplication of atomised conceptions of freedom beyond their respective spheres of validity (namely abstract right and morality).⁶⁶ In this respect, social pathologies of alienation, reification, anomie, and anxiety can be well described as effects of *damaged intersubjectivity*. A social philosophy of recognition can therefore extend Hegel's insight into the essential role of recogni-

tion: freedom as self-determination requires intersubjective recognition in order to enable freedom as self-realisation, that is to say as being with oneself in an other; failures of recognition or distortions in the normative context of recognition, by contrast, can result in various forms of social pathology, a “suffering from indeterminacy.”

This is the fundamental point of an ethics and politics of recognition: not to construct a theory of subjectivity or personal identity but to articulate the normative conditions that make possible autonomous and self-realising subjectivity as much as forms of social pathology. Drawing on Honneth and Pippin, my claim would be that Hegel’s concept of rational freedom articulates the relationship between the ontological sense of recognition presupposed by any social or linguistic interaction, and the normative structure of recognitive relations embodied in modern social and political institutions. The ontological sense of recognition is ‘actualised’ historically through social interaction between rational agents, whose own freedom is rationally grounded in the normative context of social and political recognitive relations. One of our tasks, then, as critical social philosophers is to show how the norm of reciprocal recognition can ‘negate’ forms of non-reciprocal recognition, and their attendant social pathologies, in order to point to the achievement of rational freedom: a unity of subjective and objective recognitive relations, a self-realisation in the other, that defines recognitive freedom.

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Notes

- ¹ R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 1.
- ² See, for example, P. Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1996; Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997.
- ³ See C. Taylor *et al.*, *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. A. Gutman, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994; A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. J. Anderson, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995; N. Fraser and A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London, Verso, 2003.
- ⁴ R. Pippin, “What is the Question for which Hegel’s Theory of Recognition is the

Answer?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2000, pp. 155-172. A. Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy. An Attempt at a Reactualisation of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. J. Ben-Levi, Assen, Van Gorcum, 2000.

⁵ Williams, *Hegel's Ethics*, p. 1.

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, ¶178, p. 111 (trans. mod.).

⁷ *Ibid.*, ¶175, p. 110.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ¶176, p. 110 (trans. mod.).

⁹ *Ibid.*, ¶177, p. 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ¶177, p. 110 (trans. mod.).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ¶184, p. 112.

¹² *Ibid.*, ¶178 (trans. mod.), p. 111.

¹³ See L. Siep, *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992, pp. 172-181; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 11-105; Williams, *Recognition and Ethics*; Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, pp. 99 ff., E.L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche. Philosophy, Culture, Agency*, Cambridge, Ma., MIT Press, 2000, pp. 157-191.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶180, p. 111.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶181, p. 111. There is an error in Miller's translation at this point. The passage should read: "but secondly, it equally gives the other self-consciousness back to itself again, for the first self-consciousness was conscious of itself in the other; it suspends this being in the other and thus lets the other again go free."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ¶182, pp. 111-112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ¶182, p. 112.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ¶184, p. 112.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, ¶185, p. 112 (trans. mod.).

²⁰ In Hegel's words, "they have not as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self, or as self-consciousness." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶186, p. 113.

²¹ Compare: "What is 'other' for it is an unessential, negatively characterised object. But the 'other' is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual [*Individuum*]." Hegel, *Phenomenology*, ¶186, p. 113.

²² *Ibid.*, ¶188, pp. 114-115.

²³ *Ibid.*, ¶185, pp. 112-113.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶189, p. 115.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶191, p. 116.

²⁶ Williams, *Recognition*, and *Hegel's Ethics*.

²⁷ Williams, *Recognition*, p. 144.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-149.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- ³⁴ A point made by György Markus, "Hegelian Recognition: A Critique" (unpublished manuscript), p. 11. I am indebted to Márkus' critical analysis of the structure and argumentation of the "Self-Consciousness" chapter. Márkus' critique centres on the illegitimate assumption of the category of the infinite in both its positive and deficient modes in Hegel's exposition of the recognitive structure of self-consciousness, which presupposes the assumption of the standpoint of absolute knowing and thus fatally undermines the methodological requirements of immanent phenomenological demonstration.
- ³⁵ Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, p. 109.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- ³⁸ See Stanley Rosen, *G.W.F. Hegel. An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, p. 158.
- ³⁹ Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, pp. 121-122.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 125. Developing a point made by J.M. Bernstein in "From Self-Consciousness to Community: Act and Recognition in the Master-Slave Relationship" in *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Z.A. Pelczynski, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- ⁴³ Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, p. 125.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶196, p. 119.
- ⁴⁶ R. Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2000, pp. 155-172.
- ⁴⁷ Pippin, "What is the Question?" pp. 155-156.
- ⁴⁸ See the helpful discussion of the Habermas/Henrich debate in P. Dews, "Modernity, Self-Consciousness and the Scope of Philosophy: Jürgen Habermas and Dieter Henrich in Debate," in Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment. Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, London, Verso, 1995, pp. 169-193.
- ⁴⁹ See A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995.
- ⁵⁰ Pippin, "What is the Question?" p. 155.

- ⁵¹ A. Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy. An Attempt at a Reactualisation of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. J. Ben-Levi, Assen, Van Gorcum, 2000, p. 31.
- ⁵² Pippin, "What is the Question?" p. 156.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ⁵⁵ This is the starting point for Honneth's return to the Jena Manuscripts prior to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly the 1802 *System der Sittlichkeit* and 1804/5 *Jena Philosophy of Spirit*. See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Chapters Two and Three. Pippin rejects Honneth's view that the early Jena Hegel makes a breakthrough towards the paradigm of intersubjectivity, which Hegel then abandons by reverting to the paradigm of the 'philosophy of consciousness'. For this effectively rules out the *Phenomenology*, the *Encyclopaedia*, and the *Philosophy of Right* as providing any developed theory of *Geist* as social-cultural intersubjectivity.
- ⁵⁶ Pippin, "What is the Question?" p. 158.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- ⁵⁹ Hegel, *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, §15Add., p. 49.
- ⁶⁰ Pippin, "What is the Question?" p. 163.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ⁶² Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, p. 30.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20 and p. 36.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35, where he indicates analyses of these social pathologies within the *Philosophy of Right*: "solitude" [*Einsamkeit*] in §136, "emptiness" in §141, and "labour[ing] under [. . .] a burden [*Gedrücktheit*]" in §149.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

Jean-Philippe Deranty

Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle. The Critical Potential of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

ABSTRACT

Honneth's fundamental claim that the normativity of social orders can be found nowhere but in the very experience of those who suffer injustice leads, I argue, to a radical theory and critique of society, with the potential to provide an innovative theory of social movements and a valid alternative to political liberalism.

KEYWORDS: Honneth, Marx, Recognition, Critique, Social Struggle, Critical Theory, Violence

This paper aims to explore the critical content of Axel Honneth's 'ethics of recognition', that is to say, the original potential for social and political critique that it entails. These important dimensions of Honneth's work are often ignored. The specific critical core of Honneth's model derives from his decided action-theoretic and normative stances. Combined, they produce the axioms that underpin the model: that social reproduction is embedded in normative principles which articulate the necessary conditions for individual self-realisation, and that social agents can somehow appeal, if only negatively, to these principles.

Part I provides a brief reconstruction of Honneth's paradigm. I follow the logic that led Honneth to first accept the shift proposed by Habermas towards a communicative paradigm, then critique its linguistic reduction, and in its stead offer an anthropologically inspired, more substantial, model of socialisation that famously delineates the three spheres of recognition. My main concern in this part is to highlight how the shift from older types of Critical Theory, to communication, and finally to recognition is driven by the concern already mentioned: to conduct social theory on the very level of the immanent normativity of social action and interaction. This concern leads to the fundamental notion of the moral dimension of social reproduction and, as a negative consequence, the moral dimension of social struggles.

Part II then explores the implications of this position for social and political critique. I show how the action-theoretic, normative approach enables Honneth to make the experience of injustice the driving epistemic guideline of theory itself. No other contemporary social theory gives as much theoretical relevance to the experience of social domination. In fact, I argue that Honneth quite self-consciously places his proposal within a sub-current of Critical Theory, which, against more illustrious systemic styles of analysis, has characterised itself as the theoretical spokesperson for the 'tradition of the oppressed' (Benjamin). Against all expectations, Honneth can thus be portrayed as an heir of the Marx of the historical writings, the early Lukács, but also of Walter Benjamin or Franz Fanon. The critical edge in Honneth's model becomes all the sharper if, in line with these writers, the consequence is drawn from the normative logic of recognition struggles that violence, the irreducible practical dimension of struggle, is to some extent morally justified.

Part III identifies some of the ways in which this critical edge was subsequently blunted. Although his model seems to lead naturally to a theory of social movements, and to substantial critiques of modern institutions, foremost of late capitalism, Honneth has left this part of his theory underdeveloped. Even more puzzling has been his tendency, in later texts, to recast the theory of recognition within the framework of political liberalism. In its inception, the theory of recognition provided a powerful innovative way to do without this framework. Equally, the acritical theory of modernity that underpins Honneth's model is mentioned.

These final remarks, however, could only arise out of the very strength of the model. Despite being critical, they confirm and extend the powerful critical potential contained in Axel Honneth's social philosophy.

I. Honneth's Theory of Recognition

Honneth's position is the result of a critical reception of Habermas.¹ The most fundamental assumption borrowed from Habermas is that the progress in rationality has seen the replacement of a model based on the subject-object axis with an intersubjective, communicative one. Honneth's work is a defence and illustration of the intersubjective tradition applied to social and moral philosophy. He has systematically devoted studies to the most important philosophical proponents of the intersubjectivity paradigm.² Conversely, much of his critical work in social philosophy consists in highlighting the mistakes that arise when the intersubjective dimension is neglected.

The adoption of the paradigm shift towards communicative action leads to a Meadian, symbolic-interactionist account of subject-formation, as in Habermas: The subject owes its constitution to its relationship with other subjects; autonomy can only be realised in intersubjective dependency.³ A subjective centre of action, speech and self-reflection emerges as the retroactive product of processes of internalisation of external constraints and perspectives, accessed through symbolic means, and which constrain a rebellious source of spontaneity. This means that autonomy is fundamentally 'decentred'.⁴ Equally, the social bond is best explained neither individualistically, nor holistically or systemically, but as reciprocal interaction, as communication.

Honneth identifies and makes his the early Habermasian idea that social reproduction is not best explained through instrumental action, or in terms of social labour as in Marx, but through the logic of communication.⁵ What holds society together, what enables the fragile articulation of competing yet interconnected subjective interests and expectations, is not functional integration through praxis, or the different subsystems that have arisen in modernity, but an understanding that is reached between agents about the shared assumptions that always must inform action-coordination. This understanding is made transcendently possible by underlying normative constraints.

The point where Honneth departs from Habermas and that signals the move towards the recognition paradigm is that, for Honneth, the underlying normativity making social understanding possible is not best explained in pragmatic-linguistic terms.⁶ On the conceptual level, universal pragmatics leave out of consideration other equally important dimensions of normativity that constrain social action just as much as linguistic-pragmatic rules: social agents agree on action-guiding norms not just if these norms respect their status as equal partners in communication, but also if their affective, physical well-being and their cultural and social identities are not compromised by them. The linguistic turn belies the refoundation of social theory in a materialistic philosophical anthropology that takes into consideration the, partly pre- or extradiscursive, subject-constitutive dimensions of bodily and social experience.⁷ On the critical level, the linguistic turn leads to precisely the kind of functional analysis of social domination and resistance that was supposed to have been circumvented by the focus on communication. This is because the logic of communicative rationalisation produces a reified distinction between material and social reproduction.⁸ This in turn creates the fictions of a power-free realm of communicative action and of a norm-free realm of systemic regulation which make an action-theoretic analysis of social struggle, or more specifically an analysis of the contemporary forms of alienated labour, impossible.⁹

By accepting the shift to communication, but rejecting its linguistic interpretation, the paradigm of recognition defines an action-theoretic perspective on social interaction and subjectivity: the philosophical-anthropological dimensions of individualisation through socialisation gives substance to the intersubjective hypothesis, but also, and just as importantly, to the normative dimensions of identity, social interaction and social evolution. In this model, the subject depends on relations of recognition for its formation; the self is a form of self-relating informed by the interaction with others. Three basic structures of self-relationship can be identified as fundamental conditions of subjective identity: an intimate self-relationship which grants the self the physical and affective self-assurance necessary to face the natural and social worlds; a self-relationship in which the subject sees itself as equally worth of respect, as a morally responsible subject; finally, a more substantive self-relationship which grants the subject the self-confidence that is necessary to claim its place in the social community as a valid contributor.¹⁰

These formal structures also provide the key to the normative framework of the social. Social evolution has consisted in the gradual demarcation of these different spheres of identity, both in terms of real separate identity features and in terms of a differentiation of types of rights. Social action is constrained by the normative demands implicitly expressed in these features: when one of these fundamental features is compromised by cultural or institutional arrangements, particular individual and social pathologies emerge; individual and group discontent arise as a consequence and can potentially lead to practical attempts to redress these particular injustices.

The full paradigm is precisely one of a '*struggle for recognition*', because of the logic of recognition. Recognition enables agents (individuals and groups) to both assert their identity and discover new features of their identity; these new features, however, since unrecognised, necessitate a new struggle for recognition, and so on.¹¹ The most defining aspect of Honneth's model is its constant, decisive rejection of all 'functionalist' or 'systemic' models of explanation in social theory.¹² By that, Honneth understands any model that explains social integration in terms of the structural imperatives and constraints of social systems (markets, administration, legal system). Against them, Honneth wants to defend an exclusively 'action-theoretic' perspective, one that refers social explanation back to the perspective of the agents' actions, that explains social structures as constituted through intersubjective interactions, not as the product of supra-individual necessities. In Marx, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, Foucault, Honneth identifies always the same paradox: despite their avowed goals, these theories of society deprive themselves of the very resources that are necessary for critique by succumbing to the temptation of systemic analysis.

A critical theory of society that is coherent and faithful to the seminal definitions given by the two former directors of the Frankfurt Institute,¹³ starts from the assumption that social reality contains prescientific forms of praxis from which theory and critique arise. That is to say, the normativity to which critique explicitly or implicitly refers is in the end to be found in the social itself. As a consequence (critical) theory should presuppose that social agents can somehow refer to those criteria, notably when they engage in struggles against domination. This double assumption forms the content of the concept of 'innerworldly' or 'immanent transcendence',¹⁴ which is at the heart of Critical

Theory. If critical theory defines itself in relation to forms of social discontent driven by an interest in emancipation, then it is forced to take both an action-theoretic and a normative stance. As soon as subjects are considered as mere material moulded passively by systemic processes of social and/or material reproduction, as soon as social action is understood as a quasi-automatic response to systemic demands, the gap that opens up between social reality and critical analysis becomes unbridgeable. The simple possibility of social struggles, which it is the task of critical theory to explain and justify, becomes conceptually unfathomable.

This emphasis on agency explains the 'moral' nature of social normativity. The demands for recognition and the claims of injustice, which drive both individual formation and social evolution, are specifically moral because they relate to the conditions of identity and autonomy.¹⁵ Far from being a move away from critique and emancipatory politics, the insistence on the moral dimension of social struggles places the focus, both theoretical and practical, on the normative meaningfulness of experiences of injustice, and the capacity for resistance of the dominated. For Honneth, it is the best approach to empower individuals and movements socially and politically. The many critics of the recognition paradigm who interpret Honneth's model as indicating a shift from class struggle and distributive justice to concerns about identity and culture have simply not paid enough attention to what he actually writes.¹⁶ No content of social claim is *a priori* excluded from demands of recognition. Honneth's point is simply that, even in the case of material interest, individuals engage in struggles because they want to recover basic social conditions that are essential to them as human beings.

II. The Experience of Injustice: Critical Radicality

The centrality of the 'moral' in Honneth plays a certain part in the rejection of his model by writers of Marxian and Nietzschean credence. However, Honneth insists on this term primarily for critical reasons. In this section, I want to highlight the radicality that is implicit in the notion of a moral dimension of social struggles.

Methodological Radicality

The exclusive focus on an action-theoretic approach gives Honneth's social philosophy its distinctive originality. But the way in which Honneth develops this action-theoretic emphasis is just as important.

Action-theoretic approaches to the social have to solve the problem of the access to subjective meaning, the problem of interpretation. Honneth could not hark back to a Weberian type of approach with its decidedly individualistic focus. But neither could he use a phenomenological approach as the one developed by Alfred Schütz. Instead of an 'interpretive' approach, Honneth uses a dialectical one, a methodological 'negativism' inspired by Michael Theunissen. It is based on the idea that truth cannot be accessed directly but only indirectly.¹⁷

Applied to social theory, methodological negativism states that we can gain a preliminary entry into the normative order of society only negatively. Honneth does not describe the normative conditions of individual autonomy and self-realisation in directly positive terms, nor does he attempt to devise hermeneutic tools to question the normative meaning of action in the consciousness of the actors themselves. The first step towards the normative framework is taken by reading it as the reverse image that emerges by contrast, when individual and social pathologies indicate in the negative what that order should contain. The normative order appears as the absent or damaged structures to which suffering social subjects appeal in their protest against social injuries, or even more primarily in their intimate experiences of social domination.

Honneth's model arises from the history of social struggles and a phenomenology of social suffering. Of special importance in the construction of his model are the seminal historical studies by E.P. Thompson and Barrington Moore, and the sociology of social domination, with the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Sennett as central references.¹⁸ This first 'negative' step does not make the further theoretical elaboration redundant, the one that proposes developmental and historical accounts of the intersubjective constitution of personal identity in its three fundamental dimensions. This theoretical construct, by stressing the essential intersubjective vulnerability of social subjects, gives a retrospective theoretical confirmation of the real

experiences of social suffering. There is therefore a dialectical relationship between the field of experience, which gives access to the theoretical realm, and the field of theory which gives substance to the primordial access granted by the initial phenomenological and sociological approach. This dialectical relationship between experience and theory works both at the general level of theory construction and at the empirical level of analysis of a particular society.

The main reason why Honneth chooses such a negativistic path is not so much methodological, a question of conceptual or epistemological sophistication, as it is 'critical'. Honneth is so convinced that Critical Theory can achieve its goal only if it takes seriously the imperative of grounding its claims within the immanence of social action, that he makes the experience of social suffering, the 'consciousness of injustice' (Barrington Moore), not just the object of theory, but more fundamentally its epistemic guideline.¹⁹

Like no other social theory, Honneth's paradigm of recognition relies on the assumption that theory is dependent, not simply on a level of moral concern, but on the very level of theoretical construction, down to its very language, on the experience it takes as its object. This is true firstly for the choice of the term 'recognition' itself, which is simply extracted from the discourses of real social struggles and made into a theoretical category.²⁰ The social theorist learns about the normative structure of society from the historical experiences of struggle, and when struggle is not even possible because domination is too powerful, from the experiences of suffering. In this model, consistent social theory does not interpret social reality from outside or from above. Critical Theory is inconsistent when it relies on the assumption, or leads to the result, that the victims of injustice do not themselves know, somehow, about the normativity that makes their situation unbearable and that renders critique necessary, the very normativity that sustains their feelings of dispossession, their eventual resistance, and possibly their revolts. Critical Theory must find in the very experiences of the dominated, even in their expressive silences, the resources and the language to articulate the normative framework of society to which they implicitly already referred themselves. The critical theorist speaks for the dominated: for them, not, as in systemic theories, in their place, but on their behalf. The self-reflective critical theorist is a mediating spokesperson.²¹

The approach is methodologically original in a more specific sense. If the normative must be read off negatively from experiences of socially inflicted suffering, no such experience can be *a priori* discarded. Even, and especially, that kind of social suffering is normatively, and therefore, epistemically, significant, that cannot find clear and adequate expression, either because the force of domination is strong enough to bar it from the public arena, or because it affects subjects so deeply that only psychosomatic pathologies give a negative sign of its noxious effects.

The Theoretical Counterpart of 'The Tradition of the Oppressed'

This focus on the experience of the oppressed pursues a long tradition of critical thinking, one that has been constantly repressed by the more grandiose attempts to analyse modern society in systemic terms. Yet this strand has always been kept alive, precisely because it holds fast to the simple notion that a theory of social emancipation cannot consistently disregard the very individuals it purports to speak for. This sub-current brings together the most diverse authors who, despite their important divergences, share the concern that inspires Honneth's methodological negativism. The 'tradition of the oppressed', the 'wretched of the earth' have not just moral primacy: they define a perspective that has foremost epistemic and methodological primacy. The truth of the social is not to be found in the consciousness of those who dominate, but in the experience of the dominated.

This idea finds a most famous illustration in Marx himself, with the opposition between ideology and proletarian consciousness. The proletariat and the capitalist suffer the same type of alienation, but because their experiences of alienation and of social reality are radically opposed, their epistemic positions themselves are also incommensurable. The bourgeois who profits from the alienating tendencies of his world is for that very reason unable to see its structural contradictions. The bourgeois is the first to be fooled by his own ideology. By contrast, those who actually experience social domination are potentially granted a point of view which enables them to see through the ideological veils.

Of course, a common thread between Marx and Honneth can be claimed only if it is characterised in the most formal terms. Honneth has repeatedly criticised the Marxist paradigm.²² He often points to Marx's productivist model

of action, his instrumentalist conception of rationality, the metaphysical conception of history, and the two deleterious consequences resulting from these premises: the restriction of emancipatory potential to the proletariat, and a functionalist reductionism in the analysis of modern society. Honneth's own model can be described precisely as the attempt to keep alive the driving intuition of Marx's thought: the normative and epistemic paradigmaticity of experiences of injustice, without the theoretical and critical liabilities that come with the problematic premises just mentioned.²³

Next to the functionalism of the mature economic analyses, Honneth finds another strand in Marx, which he embraces. In the early writings, the expressivist conception of labour retained action-theoretic and intersubjectivistic flavours that led to the acknowledgement of the moral dimension of alienation. This early focus on the moral dimension of social suffering disappears in the economic writings of the maturity, but reappears in a different shape in the historical studies. For instance, in his historical report on the class struggles in France, Marx's interest is widened and includes, beyond the mere utilitarian interests of the classes in conflict, their class-specific values and expectations, in other words the whole area of class-specific culture and experience.

This focus on class-specific forms of experience and their respective moral and epistemic worth is a fundamental aspect in Honneth.²⁴ Following the Marx of historical class struggles, but also Bourdieu, Honneth explicitly opposes the discourses and cultural modes of expression of dominating and dominated individuals and groups. The capacity of dominating groups to articulate moral and legal norms in universal, logically consistent language produces the illusion of a representation of the existing social order from a neutral, interest-free, epistemically and morally relevant, perspective. But there is a great suspicion that the capacity to articulate specific moral norms from an apparently neutral perspective is at least as much the result of necessity as it is the product of specific abilities: it is precisely because ruling classes have to justify their social domination that they are made to produce universalistic forms of morality. As Honneth says, they are under "a social constraint of justification."²⁵ However consistent moral justification is, it remains a form of justification, a justification of social domination. Moreover, the rul-

ing classes also rule over the symbolic universe and thus exercise a monopoly over the very means that enable any group or individual to present their experiences in legitimate terms. These two socially determined structures, the lack of justificatory pressure and the inaccessibility of symbolic means enabling a socially acceptable representation of specific experiences combine, with other social and political mechanisms, to bar dominated classes from participating in the public sphere, from having their voices heard and acknowledged as relevant. The normative characterisation of moral discourse *de facto* creates forms of cultural hegemony. Conversely, however, these two structures and the cultural exclusion that results from it are precisely the sources of the moral and epistemic superiority of the individuals and groups suffering from social exclusion: beneath the justificatory discourse of the existing order, their invisible, unheard attempt at expressing suffering and discontent point to the reality of the existing order, and, negatively, to the normative ideal that could drive change. Therefore, as Honneth concludes, it is in the repressed experiences of social suffering that 'historical progress' finds its real resource.

Honneth's constant interest in class-specific forms of experience and their relevance for critical theory are a retrieval and transformation of the Marxist intuition that precisely those who suffer from injustice have a privileged position, in epistemic terms, but of course also in an emancipatory perspective. The fundamental difference is that, with the abandonment of the exclusive focus on the revolutionary character of the proletariat, all forms of social suffering and experiences of injustice become *a priori* relevant.

This proximity between the central inspiration of Marxism and Honneth's theory of recognition is confirmed by Honneth's strong engagement with the Marxist scholar who best thematised the epistemic superiority of the dominated, Georg Lukács. Famously, the third part of *History and Class Consciousness* is devoted precisely to the analysis of the truth content of the proletarian standpoint. Of course, there is, as with Marx, no straight continuity between Lukács and Honneth. In Lukács, Honneth sees precisely the fateful influence of a theory of emancipation driven by a philosophy of history which led the first generation of Critical Theory into an impasse. However, Honneth's study of the early Lukács shows how much he wants to retain the spirit of Lukács'

early romantic anti-capitalism.²⁶ In it, Honneth finds a precursor to his idea that justice and freedom imply individual self-realisation through successful socialisation. Interestingly for Honneth, Lukács provides such a focus from within the Marxist tradition, where the utilitarianism of the orthodox interpretation usually precludes it. Lukács' 'socialromantic' reading of Marx is precisely the reason why he is able to develop a social-theoretical view that is sensitive to 'social suffering and individual pain', a theory in which 'social suffering can appear as suffering'.²⁷

In his important reconstruction of the theoretical projects that founded the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Honneth applies his recurrent critique of 'functionalist reductionism' to the authors that formed the 'inner core' of the Institute, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse.²⁸ In opposition to them, Honneth sees another precursor in Walter and Benjamin. Against Adorno's blindness to class-specific experiences and cultural achievements and his blanket rejection of modern forms of cultural expression, Honneth approvingly finds in Benjamin a writer for whom "the conflict between classes was a continually lived experience, as well as a theoretical premise of every cultural and social analysis." Benjamin was able to see that "it is the cultural struggle of social classes itself that determines the integrative ability of society."²⁹ As a consequence, Benjamin was able to view cultural phenomena not just as the effects of a totalitarian process of reification, but as empowering and expressive elements, as the cultural dimension of social struggle.

As always with Honneth, one should read in the words dedicated to another author an indirect description of his own theses. This is confirmed by another study, where Honneth interprets Benjamin's messianic conception of history as a theory of recognition.³⁰ Benjamin sees justice in the duty, repeated for each generation, of giving the 'tradition of the oppressed' its right, by wrenching it from the interpretation imposed by the winners. This, Honneth claims, amounts to elevating the invisible subjects of domination to the status of integral partners in communication, that is to say to recognising them at last, beyond a past invisibility that history, as the historical self-assertion of the winners, had fatefully entrenched.

Other authors in the tradition of social critique could be mentioned, which have been commented upon in positive terms by Honneth, and share with

him the methodological decision to paradigmatically focus on social suffering as the relevant epistemic perspective in social theory: Georges Sorel,³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre,³² or Franz Fanon.³³

The Moral Justification of Violence

The moral dimension of social struggles does not lead to a weakening of the critical potential of Critical Theory. On the contrary, it implies that primacy be given to the experience of social suffering at the methodological and even epistemic level. Few social theories have dared make this move, even within the critical tradition. This goes even further if we now focus on the agonistic dimension of recognition. If social struggles are more than just the battles between divergent strategic interests, or the symptoms of systemic failures, if in fact they are waged on the basis of unmet demands for recognition which, because they try to defend, vindicate or redress the very identity and autonomy of endangered subjects, are fundamentally moral, then struggles themselves have a moral dimension, that is to say they are themselves normatively significant. This new aspect is also easily overlooked and its radicality ignored. Honneth's social philosophy provides not just an explanation, a descriptive framework, but more importantly a normative justification of social struggles. The normativity of social struggles has two dimensions. First, struggle is normatively justified as the engine of evolution, both at the level of the species and for individuals. Social movements have been responsible for the emergence and entrenchment of differentiated types of rights, from political, to social, to cultural rights. The previous comparison with Marx receives a new confirmation: with the abandonment of the proletariat as the class of emancipation, Honneth rewrites Marx's famous thesis that history is the history of class struggles. Modern history is the history of social struggles.

The critical potential of this justification of social struggle becomes all the more obvious, and in fact all the more radical, if the focus shifts from the teleological normative justification of social struggles as factors of evolution, to their dynamic aspects, the conditions of their emergence, the logic of their development and their own internal structure.

According to the theory of recognition, subjects engage in struggles for recognition when features of their identity that are essential for their full autonomy have not been recognised: since an identity feature can only be established

intersubjectively, the lack of recognition leads directly to the damage or negation of the feature itself. The consequence of this claim and its critical radicality are inevitable and rarely noticed: if subjects and groups build their identity and achieve their autonomy only through struggles for recognition, this means that there is a moral justification of violence. After all violence is what every struggle analytically entails.

‘Violence’ in this context covers the widest range of individual and collective phenomena, from the most passive and individualised forms of resistance, to the most destructive types of action, including the whole spectrum of more or less institutionalised and/or institutionally recognised forms of claim, appeal and resistance. The use of violence as a general notion is warranted, however, because the notion of a struggle for recognition indicates precisely that something that is normatively owed the subjects could not be acquired by them from within the existing order. Recognition entails the breaking of the existing order because that order fails subjects or groups in fundamental ways.

It is not sufficient to reduce the active side of struggles for recognition to acceptable, institutionally legitimate forms of resistance and claims. This misses the point about the necessarily antagonistic aspect of recognition. As soon as a claim is institutionalised, it has by definition passed successfully the threshold of recognition. On the contrary, struggles for recognition are precisely struggles that aim to institutionalise claims that were not yet seen as legitimate. In this sense they are ‘violent’, as doing violence to, as not respecting, as attempting to disrupt and change, an existing order of reality.

The retrospective historical gaze can be misleading. In the case of the historical examples of the acquisition of political and social rights, it has taken generations, an infinite mass of courage, sacrifice and suffering, to impose personal rights, citizenship rights, and later on, social rights. If today a struggle for recognition appeals to those rights, it does not mean that it is no longer violent because it appeals to already institutionalised rights: if it is an authentic struggle for recognition, its specific ‘violence’ consists in the fact that some individuals or groups that so far appeared as not legitimately protected by those rights now claim precisely that the opposite is the case, that they do

fall under their jurisdiction. In the Australian context, the granting of citizenship rights to Aboriginals in 1967, or the recognition of their previous ownership of the land are typical examples of the vindicating of old rights for as yet unrecognised bearers of those rights. If violence is taken in this general sense of a disruption of the existing order, then it is accurate to say that for Honneth, as for Marx and Engels, *mutatis mutandis*, violence is 'the instrument thanks to which the social movement vanquishes'.

The examples so far point to acceptable forms of violence, a violence that is not really violent, a violence that disrupts only institutional realities. But the logic of struggle for recognition does not *a priori* exclude forms of violence directed against property or even against persons.

In *Unsichtbarkeit*, Honneth attempts an analysis of the moral epistemology of recognition by taking as its point of departure the book by Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. He refers to the passage in the prologue where the "narrator tells how he has always tried to defend himself against his own invisibility by 'beating around' with his own fists."³⁴ Honneth interprets the crude description of physical violence in the following way: "what in the text is described as a 'beating around with one's own fists' must be taken in a metaphorical sense and must in all probability designate all those practical attempts with which a subject attempts to draw attention to himself."³⁵ Honneth clearly metaphorises, or at least euphemises, the text and his own theory when he transforms 'beating around' into 'practical attempts'. This becomes obvious if we ask what sort of 'praxis' is meant here. It is the praxis of a subject that *provokes* a reaction in others simply in order to be acknowledged by them. As the book makes clear, provocation here indicates the whole array of 'existence-ascertaining attitudes', including the very physical provocation of beating someone up, or even threatening to 'slit their throat', to violently force them to finally *see* you.

Already in *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth had encountered the phenomenon of personal aggression as part of the developmental logic of recognition, with a discussion of the passage in the 1805 Jena lectures where Hegel discusses crime as originating in the law itself. In this text, Hegel shows that an abstract legal recognition also entails misrecognition of other essential features of the individuals, such that the law itself, because of its abstraction, is

responsible for crime. Here again, the text of reference is graphic: "I commit crime, acts of violence, robbery, theft, insult, etc."³⁶

The vague phrase of a moral justification of violence obviously needs to be further detailed. Justification operates firstly as diagnostic and explanation: crime is not only the sign of failures in socialisation, of individual psychological disorders, it can be the symptom of unmet demands for recognition, of pathological tendencies originating in the social order itself. The claims of recognition might therefore be justified even when the means used to express or fulfill them are not. The theory of recognition shows that social violence can have its origin in a violence done to society.

Further than that, no recognition can be achieved without struggle, which in turn necessarily implies some 'violence' done, at least to the cultural framework, the laws, or some institutional arrangements of a given society. How does the theory of recognition decide between the normative necessity of some 'violence' and the recognition of other people's rights, including the rights of those who deny recognition? Are there cases where, say, damage to private property would be justified as a means towards a justified end of recognition? This does not seem *a priori* impossible to accept. Hegel's justification of the 'right of necessity' is a justification of violence done to the law and private property in the name of a higher principle.³⁷ Are there cases where attacks against individuals, 'insult', 'robbery', or even 'crime' could be justified as justified means for a justified end of recognition? However uncomfortable this question, it is one that the theory of recognition cannot avoid asking itself. The tradition in which Honneth's work is located has historically always answered in the clearest way: yes, in the case of the gravest denials of recognition, extreme physical violence, including murder was justified. Beside Marx and Engels, one can think of the Benjamin of the "Critique of Violence" and other later texts, or the first chapter of Fanon's, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

III. The Critical Edge Blunted

Against systemic reductionisms, the theory of recognition empowers individuals and groups fighting against all forms of domination since it shows how the normative resources that are necessary for critique and the practi-

cal attempts at emancipation are to be found nowhere but in the very experience of those who suffer from, and more or less implicitly reject, the existing order. Despite this promising renewal of critical theory, however, Honneth fails to answer crucial questions which arise directly from his model. In this third section, a series of immanent critical points is made: they arise from the disappointment that occurs when the promises that seem to be contained in Honneth's initial proposal are left unfulfilled.

An Unacknowledged Logic of Social Movements

As the sub-title of *Struggle for Recognition* attests, Honneth explicitly presents his theory as a theory of 'social conflicts'. However, if he does provide a seductive account of the moral dimension behind social suffering and thereby an account of the moral dimension that triggers and fuels social movements, he offers no further distinction and analysis of the specific 'dynamic', 'practical' and normative logics driving them. Chapter Nine of *Struggle for Recognition*, which claims that the theory of recognition is relevant for sociological approaches to conflict remains desperately short of important conceptual distinctions. In particular, it does not address, nor does any later text, the crucial problem of the justification of recognition claims, and the distinction, highlighted above, between justified claims, justified ends and justified means. Honneth has only ventured so far as to show how the three spheres of recognition can lead to conflicting demands that require case-sensitive deliberations in individual, moral situations,³⁸ but this doesn't address the dilemma of justified claims using illegitimate means.

The different dynamic and normative dimensions of social movements have been well identified and substantially developed in the work of Emmanuel Renault.³⁹ In his latest book, in particular, Renault convincingly proves that the account provided by Honneth of the 'moral dimension' of social suffering and social conflicts creates the conditions of possibility for a theoretical model of the different dimensions of the emergence and development of social movements. What are the conditions that are structurally necessary for individual experiences of social suffering to be harnessed so that they can give rise to collective action? What subjective and collective processes are at play when violations of the intimate sphere lead to organised resistance and action? In other words, how does social suffering become politically relevant? It is

the role of the philosopher, and not just of the empirical sociologist, to make these conceptual distinctions and study these processes, since the developmental logic of social movements is supported by a normativity that is conceptually justified and reconstructed.

An Undeveloped Critical Analysis of Institutions

This lack of further development is especially obvious if we consider the horizon that the theory of recognition opens for alternative critical analyses of 'systemic' phenomena, those social, economic, and political institutions that seem best explained as the results of endogenous systemic logics. The theory of recognition seems to be particularly weak when compared with the sweeping descriptions and critiques that systemic theories of modern institutions are able to make. In fact, however, Renault proves that the theory of recognition is able, not just to give a theory of social movements, but grants also a coherent and innovative perspective on such institutional, 'systemic' realities as the legal sphere, the labour and the commodity markets.⁴⁰

As Renault remarks, it is striking that Honneth's interpretation of recognition leaves out of consideration the important interaction between subjects and institutions. One of the most important lessons of Hegel's theory of *Sittlichkeit* is precisely that individual autonomy depends on institutional realities for its concrete realisation. Despite his rereading of the *Philosophy of Right* as a critical diagnostic of modern social pathologies,⁴¹ Honneth has never widened the scope of intersubjectivity to include institutional recognition. This probably explains why he has failed so far to develop a more substantial critique of modern institutions as an obvious consequence of his own model.

If institutional arrangements, as the results of compromises between groups in conflict, are embedded in normative frameworks, then the theory of recognition provides a key, not just for the diagnostic of existing pathologies, nor is it just restricted to explaining the different struggles for recognition that erupt as a result of asymmetrical distributions of power, more profoundly, the theory of recognition might also provide a key to the analysis of the functioning of institutions itself. Of course, this access to institutional realities through the contested normative assumptions implied in them does not pro-

vide an exhaustive interpretive view. There is no denying the partially autonomous development of subsystems. But the normative, recognitive dimension is a fundamental part of those institutional realities and it is just as mistaken to leave out of consideration their normative embeddedness.

To give just one example, the developments in contemporary capitalism can be explained, to an important extent, through the antagonistic interplay between those classes that own the different modes of value-accumulation and constantly attempt to widen their scope, with those who produce value and suffer directly from changes in the nature of labour. Capitalistic economies could not function if there was not a basic acceptance of some of its fundamental normative assumptions, but, conversely, the factual framework that results from this asymmetrical compromise between social forces, contains numerous conflictual points which need constant justification and renegotiation.⁴² Too many theories of contemporary capitalism forget that the neo-liberal push towards the abolition of the welfare-State and the globalisation of exchanges have been the result of a concerted, organised effort on the part of business groups, backed by an army of ideologues, and put into practice by convinced or interested politicians. There is nothing fateful about them. These efforts have been and continue to be opposed, just as much as they need constant justification.

An Alternative Political Theory Repressed

In no dimension is the blunting of the potentially radical nature of Honneth's theory more obvious than in its political aspect. The fundamental thesis, inspired by Hegel, that self-determination is only abstract if it is accounted for separate from the conditions of self-realisation leads to an important insight, that, again, is quite innovative in the contemporary landscape, namely that the theory of justice cannot separate strictly the just from the good. Of course, the good cannot be included in a substantial sense. What is required is a 'formal ethics', a description in formal terms of those social structures that are always necessary for the self-realisation of subjects. The last chapter in *Struggle for Recognition* explicitly presented the theory of recognition as an alternative to both liberalism and communitarianism, avoiding the abstraction and individualism of the former, and the normative overburdening of the latter.

The following words, written about the early Lukács, are a good summary of Honneth's early critical view of liberal definitions of justice: "an ineradicable connection between individual self-realisation and community formation" makes it possible to extend "the idea of progress beyond the concept of social justice and universal freedom."⁴³ Linked with the intuition driving the action-theoretic focus and the methodological negativism, this rejection of political liberalism was highly innovative and far-reaching. The direct consequence is that liberal theories of justice must face the same kind of suspicion as did moral justification: the appeal to highly formal principles of social justice and general freedom, however consistent these might sound, does not provide a conceptual language that can account for social injustice. It fails on its own terms. An adequate theory of justice can only develop negatively, as the negative set of principles appealed to in real experiences of injustice. The normativity within 'the consciousness of injustice', which is articulated and harnessed in social struggles, is therefore not just moral or social, it also has concrete political relevance, in that it normatively questions the principles of a community, and, when organised collectively, projects an alternative model of a just society.

In *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth was very close to acknowledging this aspect of his theory. He writes in the penultimate chapter: "In the light of norms of the sort constituted by the principle of moral responsibility or the values of society, personal experiences of disrespect can be interpreted and represented as something that can potentially affect other subjects."⁴⁴ The discovery by the subject that his experience has a social character, is in fact symbolic of a group-experience, is the motivational basis for a collective action that relies on this shared experience. Therefore, the initial intimate experience of injustice harbours the potential that is required for real political action. More profoundly, the negativistic methodology leads to the conclusion that there is no access to justice principles except negatively, from the immanence of experiences of injustice in which the abstraction of liberal principles comes to light, and new rights and/or new applications of existing rights are demanded. But Honneth never visited the avenue that his own theory had opened up. Instead, in his last writings, he has been anxious to recast the theory of recognition within classical political liberalism,⁴⁵ thus renouncing the original political stance provided by his early Hegelianism, his strong action-theoretic approach and his methodological negativism.

Acritical Theory of Modernity

There is a tension in Honneth's writings, between the darkness of the sociological diagnostics drawing on contemporary sociological research,⁴⁶ and the conceptual reconstructions which offer an idealised version of modernity. Many critics of Honneth probably think mainly of the second type of texts and do not realise that they are only the counterpart to highly critical accounts of modernity in its empirical reality.

All critical-theoretical models draw their ultimate inspiration from a fundamental vision of modernity. It is striking that, despite his expert sociological critique of contemporary pathologies, Honneth continues to maintain the Habermasian trust in a general tendency towards 'moral progress', a vision of Enlightenment as an unfinished project, where Enlightenment now stands for autonomy through full self-realisation. Honneth never discusses the worst moral failures of modernity, totalitarianism and colonialism. Does the general model of recognition become obsolete if the thesis of a general 'moral progress' and 'social evolution' is problematised, or even dropped?⁴⁷ Does the normativity of recognition collapse if it is no longer supported by a teleological, idealised account of modernity?⁴⁸ More specifically, does the recognitive value of law become obsolete if the history of modern rights is problematised and the ambiguous role played by law in the worst evils of modernity is also taken into account?

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Notes

- ¹ Although Habermas seems to think that the recognition paradigm does not represent a shift from his own. See J. Habermas, *The Inclusion Of The Other. Studies in Political Theory*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, p. 208.
- ² Hegel of course, but also Rousseau, Fichte, the young Marx, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Gadamer, Lévinas, Taylor, Habermas evidently. Husserl is one major figure that seems to be missing from this list.
- ³ Habermas famously adopts Mead's pragmatic, interactionist theory of social action in the second volume of his *Theory Of Communicative Action*, but Honneth was also instrumental, with Hans Joas, in the rediscovery of Mead in German social

theory. See H. Joas, *G.H. Mead. A Contemporary Re-examination Of His Thought*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1985.

- ⁴ This is developed in chapters 4 and 5 of Honneth's *Struggle For Recognition. The Moral Grammar Of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995. A concise summary is provided in A. Honneth, "Decentered Autonomy: The Subject After The Fall," in *The Fragmented World Of The Social. Essays In Social And Political Philosophy*, ed. C. Wright, New York, State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 266-267. Along with Hans Joas, Honneth was instrumental in the rediscovery of Mead. See their *Social Action And Human Nature*, trans. R. Meyer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 59-70.
- ⁵ More precisely, he identifies two paths in Habermas and chooses the repressed, fully communicative one over the path later taken by Habermas that consists in a synthesis of action-theoretic and systemic approaches. See A. Honneth, *The Critique Of Power. Reflective Stages In A Critical Theory Of Society*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1991, chapters 8 and 9, especially pp. 268-277.
- ⁶ Besides the critical study of Habermas in the last three chapters of *The Critique Of Power*, the two central texts, dating from the early 1990s, where Honneth signals his departure from the pragmatic-linguistic interpretation of communication towards a more fully-fledged, anthropological one are: "Die soziale Dynamik von Mißachtung. Zur Ortbestimmung einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie," in *Das Andere Der Gerechtigkeit. Aufsätze zur praktischen Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2000, pp. 88-109; "Moral Consciousness And Class Domination. Some Problems In The Analysis Of Hidden Morality," in *The Fragmented World*, pp. 205-209.
- ⁷ As Honneth's early work with Joas suggests, the methodological function of philosophical anthropology seems to be central in Honneth's model. He seems to want to replace the communicative action grounded in universal pragmatics with an anthropologically grounded theory of intersubjectivity. This avoids the idealisation of social interaction that he perceives in Habermas, with its corollary deficit in critical potential. This is confirmed by the latest text published by Honneth in which the epistemology of social recognition is unlocked through recourse to developmental psychology with strong anthropological undertones. See A. Honneth, *Unsichtbarkeit. Stationen Einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2003, pp. 10-27. However, the anthropological foundation of cognitive structures is also interpreted historically, so much so that sometimes, in his later texts, Honneth denies the anthropological foundation in favour of the historical one. See A. Honneth, *Unsichtbarkeit. Stationen Einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2003, pp. 10-27. Compare with his rejection of the anthropological objection put by Fraser and others, *Redistribution Or Recognition?*

A Political-Philosophical Exchange, trans. J. Golb, J. Ingram, and C. Wilke, London/New York, Verso, 2003, pp. 181-182, and note 82.

⁸ Honneth, *The Critique Of Power*, chapters 8 and 9. See also "Critical Theory," in *The Fragmented World*, pp. 86-91.

⁹ Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action," in *The Fragmented World*, pp. 46-49.

¹⁰ The model is presented in all its details in chapter 5 of *Struggle For Recognition* and numerous texts thereafter simply refer back to that book.

¹¹ This summary of the logic of recognition in the early Jena Hegel is also a good description of Honneth's own understanding of it: "Since within the framework of an ethically established relationship of mutual recognition, subjects are always learning something more about their particular identity, and since, in each case, it is a new dimension of their selves that they see confirmed thereby, they must once again leave, by means of conflict, the stage of ethical life they have reached, in order to achieve the recognition of more demanding form of their individuality." Honneth, *Struggle For Recognition*, p. 17. This is confirmed at the end of the book, with the application to the sociology of social conflicts, p. 162.

¹² This is probably the most fundamental inspiration behind Honneth's thought. He has never wavered over it.

¹³ Horkheimer's famous article "Traditional And Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. M.J. O'Connell et al., New York, Continuum Publication Corporation, 1982. J. Habermas, "Knowledge And Human Interests: A General Perspective," appendix to *Knowledge And Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro, New York, Beacon, 1971, pp. 301-317. Honneth has proposed several masterful reconstructions of the tradition of Critical Theory. See the first three chapters of *The Critique Of Power*, the article "Critical Theory" quoted above, and "Pathologien Des Sozialen. Tradition Und Aktualität Der Sozialphilosophie," in *Das Andere Der Gerechtigkeit*, pp. 47-53.

¹⁴ Honneth, "Die Soziale Dynamik Von Mißachtung," p. 96.

¹⁵ Despite his unmistakable emphasis on the 'moral' grammar of social conflicts, Honneth's model is constantly read as a model of identity politics in an exclusively cultural sense.

¹⁶ The typical rhetorical gesture is to write Taylor "and Honneth," as if the commas, or brackets, were sufficient to justify this alignment. In fact, the political scope and dimensions of Honneth's ethics of recognition are very different from those of Taylor's liberal interpretation of the model, as this article attempts to show.

¹⁷ See E. Anghern, ed., *Dialektischer Negativismus. Michael Theunissen zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1992.

¹⁸ Honneth cites two types of historical and sociological studies: seminal works that have established a new perspective in class-studies, that of a 'moral economy'

(E.P. Thompson) underlying social movements, and contemporary research whose results confirm empirically or in specific areas the fundamental theses presented in those seminal works. The seminal historical work is E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968. Honneth presents his own model as a theoretical account of Thompson's notion of 'moral economy'. Also seminal is Barrington Moore's *Injustice: The Social Bases Of Obedience And Revolt*, London, Macmillan, 1978. Richard Sennett's *The Hidden Injuries Of Class*, New York, Knopf 1972, provides the seminal reference in the sociological literature. The amount of contemporary historical and sociological work used by Honneth to substantiate the theory of recognition is tremendous. Any serious critique of Honneth has to face the task of matching him in the use and knowledge of historical and sociological literature.

- 19 The article "Moral consciousness and Class Domination" is the most explicit text in this respect.
- 20 Not only does the theory of recognition borrow its central concept from real social movements, but conversely it is confirmed empirically a second time when new social movements are interpreted from its perspective. See G. Presbey, "The Struggle For Recognition In The Philosophy Of Axel Honneth, Applied To The Current South African Situation And Its Call For An 'African Renaissance'" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 537-561; R. Boelens, "Local Rights And Legal Recognition: The Struggle For Indigenous Water Rights And The Cultural Politics Of Participation," Paper presented at the Third World Water Forum, 16-23 March 2003, Kyoto, Japan; P. McInness, "Rights, Recognition And Community Mobilisation To Gain Access To Basic Municipal Services In Soweto," conference proceedings of the 2003 annual conference of the Macquarie University Centre For Research On Social Inclusion, www.crsi.mq.edu.au/research_sit.html.
- 21 This important implication of the recognition-paradigm for the position of theory in relationship with its object has been most clearly underlined by Emmanuel Renault in his article "La philosophie critique: porte-parole de la souffrance sociale," in *Mouvements*, no. 34, 2002.
- 22 See especially chapter 7 of *Struggle For Recognition*.
- 23 This is most explicitly affirmed in "Domination And Moral Struggle: The Philosophical Heritage Of Marxism Revisited" in Honneth, *The Fragmented World*, pp. 3-14.
- 24 The texts where this dimension of his thought appears most clearly are: "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," but also the first chapter of his first reply to Nancy Fraser in *Redistribution Or Recognition?*
- 25 Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," p. 210.
- 26 Honneth, "A Fragmented World: On The Implicit Relevance Of Lukács' Early Work" in *The Fragmented World*, pp. 50-60. It is worth noting that in the German

edition, the article is in first position and clearly gives the whole book its title, suggesting that, even more than a retrieval of Marx, Honneth's is the attempt to fulfil the 'implicit' potential in Lukács.

²⁷ This is in fact the driving concern behind Honneth's constructs: that theory should never be severed from the real social experience, from the depth and multi-dimensionality of social suffering as *social*.

²⁸ Honneth, "Critical Theory," see above.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁰ Honneth, "Kommunikative Erschließung Der Vergangenheit. Zum Zusammenhang Von Anthropologie Und Geschichtsphilosophie Bei Walter Benjamin" in *Die Zerrissene Welt des Sozialen. Sozialphilosophische Aufsätze*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1999 (2nd extended edition).

³¹ Honneth, *Struggle For Recognition*, chapter 7.

³² *Ibid.* See also *Unsichtbarkeit*, pp. 71-105.

³³ Honneth, *Struggle For Recognition*, pp. 157-160. Beyond undeniable differences, Honneth and Jacques Rancière share a common rejection of social philosophies that approach the social 'from above'. See J.-P. Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," *Political Theory*, vol. 31, no. 1, February 2003, pp. 136-156.

³⁴ *Unsichtbarkeit*, p. 14. R. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)* with commentary by Leo Rauch, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1983, p. 130.

³⁷ See *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 127.

³⁸ "Decentered Autonomy: The Subject After The Fall," in *The Fragmented World*, p. 271.

³⁹ E. Renault, *Mépris Social. Ethique Et Politique De La Reconnaissance*, Bègles, Editions du Passant, 2000; "Politique De L'identité. Politique Dans L'identité" in *Lignes 6*, 2001; "Entre Libéralisme Et Communautarisme: Une Troisième Voie?" in eds., E. Renault and Y. Sintomer, Yves, *Où en est la théorie critique?* Paris, La découverte, 2003, pp. 251-268; *Expérience De L'injustice. Reconnaissance et Clinique De L'injustice*, Paris, La découverte, 2004.

⁴⁰ Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice*, Chapter 3: "The institutions of injustice."

⁴¹ A. Honneth, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2001.

⁴² In Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, pp. 254-256. Honneth himself suggests this, but the passing suggestion is not further developed. His latest book confirms that he does not want his theory to take this path.

⁴³ Honneth, *The Fragmented World*, p. 59.

- ⁴⁴ Honneth, *Struggle For Recognition*, p. 162. The point is repeated p. 164.
- ⁴⁵ This shift from an Hegelian alternative in the texts around *Struggle For Recognition*, towards a more orthodox liberal position is explicitly made in *Redistribution or Recognition?* See pp. 177-179. In *Unsichtbarkeit*, the Hegelian inspiration seems to be reneged upon (see the Preface, p. 7), and the important first text of the book, the eponymous "*Unsichtbarkeit*," strikingly interprets recognition in Kantian terms.
- ⁴⁶ See especially the collection of essays *Disintegration. Bruchstücke einer soziologischen Zeitdiagnose*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1995. See also, "Organisierte Selbstverwirklichung. Paradoxien der Individualisierung," in ed. Axel Honneth, *Befreiung aus der Mündigkeit. Paradoxien des gegen wärtigen Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus, 2002, pp. 141-158.
- ⁴⁷ Again, the later *Redistribution or Recognition* texts are strikingly less critical of modernity than the earlier texts. See for instance, pp. 182-183.
- ⁴⁸ This ideal account of modernity is needed, according to Honneth, in order to anchor and thus justify the normative claims found in recognition. See *Struggle for Recognition*, chapter 9.

Nikolas Kompridis

From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the 'Ethical Turn' in Critical Theory

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I take issue with Axel Honneth's proposal for renewing critical theory in terms of the normative ideal of 'self-realisation'. Honneth's proposal involves a break with critical theory's traditional preoccupation with the meaning and potential of modern reason, and the way he makes that break depletes the critical resources of his alternative to Habermasian critical theory, leaving open the question of what form the renewal of critical theory should take.

KEYWORDS: Axel Honneth, critique, reason, the good, recognition, self-realisation

I. A New Normative Paradigm for Critical Theory?

In the last five to ten years there has been growing acknowledgement and growing concern that the project of critical theory has once again reached an impasse. The impasse before which it stands today is quite different from the one before which Horkheimer and Adorno stood when they wrote *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment. It is also quite unlike the one before which Habermas stood when he took on the enormous task of reconstructing the 'normative foundations' of critical theory. On the one hand, the pessimism and scepticism that suffused Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and once made it scandalous, is now the default position of much of academic high culture. On the other, the predominantly confident defence of the universalistic content of reason typical of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, is strikingly out of tune with post-1989 and post-9/11 modernity, particularly the pervasive and complex scepticism that has come to distinguish our self-consciously historicist and culturally pluralistic modernity.

Only in the years after the publication of his *magnum opus* did Habermas begin to respond to the challenge of 'postmodern' scepticism. Unfortunately, the lectures that comprise *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* are altogether *too* successful in their attempt to repel this challenge, leaving the impression that the entire phenomenon was simply the result of an egregious theoretical error, rather than an ever-present possibility, an ever-present temptation, that inheres in the cultural conditions of modernity. Although Habermas eventually came to recognise that the exhaustion of utopian energies and the decline of cultural confidence may actually be the most worrisome effects of this scepticism, neither he nor anyone else has subsequently reformulated the project in response to the new historical situation. In the meantime, critical theory has also succumbed to the sceptical mood of the times.¹

Though there are far fewer defenders of the project than there were only a few years ago, some are still prepared to defend it in a more pragmatic, more situated version.² Even if these internal revisions contribute to making critical theory more palatable to an increasingly sceptical audience, they neither regenerate its critical energy nor replenish its normative content. Whatever one may think of these restatements of the project, there is no denying that critical theory has entered a *post-Habermasian* phase.³

The question of how to get the project going again naturally impinges upon the problem of determining the identity of critical theory—of determining what it is, and what it is supposed to be doing. As already stated, this is more difficult than it once was, for post-empiricist and anti-foundationalist devel-

opments in philosophy and the social sciences have made the classic distinction between 'critical' and 'traditional' theory far less salient than before. It has also become more difficult to distinguish critical theory from other models of social and cultural critique, particularly since some of these also lay claim (and may be more entitled) to the name 'critical theory'—for example, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, and so on.

Rather than defending a more pragmatic, more situated interpretation of the project, a new generation of critical theorists is moving in a different direction altogether, placing far greater emphasis upon the normativity of ideas of the good. Reflecting the influence of a number of historical and contemporary philosophers from Aristotle and Hegel to Heidegger, Tugendhat, and Taylor, they are especially attracted to some version of the ideal of self-realisation (or authenticity). I therefore wish to refer to attempts such as these as constituting an 'ethical turn' in critical theory, the nature of which involves a radical shift of critical attention from impediments to a balanced realisation of reason in history to impediments to individual self-realisation.⁴

In a series of provocative papers written following the publication of *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth has been the most vocal and most prominent exponent of this 'ethical turn'.⁵ For Honneth, critical theory's historically continuous, self-defining concern with reason has made it blind to a host of modern 'social pathologies' that cannot be comprehended as "pathologies of an ambiguously rationalised lifeworld."⁶

What should be recognised as characteristic of all previous models of social critique is the consistent measurement of social pathologies or anomalies only according to the stage circumscribed by the development of human rationality. That is why only anomalies which occur in the cognitive dimensions of the human being can be regarded as deviations from an ideal that must be presupposed categorically as the standard for a 'healthy' or intact form of society. Accordingly, such a perspective is accompanied by a rationality-theoretic narrowing of social critique—which is also a legacy of Left Hegelianism. As a result, all those social pathologies which do not refer to the developmental level of human rationality cannot come to light at all.⁷

The 'social pathologies' that interest Honneth are those that arise from obstacles to individual self-realisation, due to which subjects are unable to understand themselves as both equal and 'unique' members of society. The resources of a new critical theory are now to be found in the normative gaps between legitimate demands for such recognition as is necessary for unimpaired self-realisation and their illegitimate denial. Thus, he proposes a shift of normative paradigm from the presuppositions of communicative rationality to the presuppositions of "human identity development."⁸ Honneth tries to show that this shift is neither arbitrary nor contingent. It is not arbitrary because he believes his alternative normative perspective is objectively available in "pretheoretical" everyday practice.⁹ Hence, he claims that his conception of critical theory "is anchored extra-theoretically as an empirical interest or moral experience" in the "social culture of everyday life."¹⁰ If anything can still be said to distinguish critical theory, claims Honneth, it is the attempt to "rediscover an element of its own critical viewpoint within social reality."¹¹ In this respect, Honneth believes that he has established what Habermas failed to establish—a direct, verifiable correspondence between the standpoint of critical theory and everyday moral experience. On Honneth's view, the violation of the rule-character of linguistic-cum-social norms cannot directly correspond to moral experience in the way that the violation of moral identity claims can—for example, in moral experiences such as humiliation, disrespect, and shame.¹²

Honneth's approach is not contingent because its normative standpoint does not depend upon the contemporary 'politics of recognition'. Indeed, Honneth strains mightily to distinguish his approach not only from the 'politics of recognition', but also from any normative perspective indebted to the merely contingent political struggles or moral conflicts of the present. It is an approach that seeks a normative foundation below the shifting surfaces of historical change. Honneth insists that his normative paradigm is not beholden to the contingency of the present, because he is of the view that the "presuppositions of human identity development" have both a quasi-anthropological and quasi-transcendental status. Like Charles Taylor, Honneth is convinced that "nonrecognition or misrecognition . . . can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being."¹³ Due recognition is not just "a vital human need,"¹⁴ thinks Honneth; it is also a transhistorical and transcultural normative expectation.

There are two features of Honneth's bold theoretical initiative with which I am partially sympathetic, but which I find very problematic nonetheless. The first is his interest in 'rediscovering' critical theory's emancipatory interest within social reality itself. Though this strong connection to everyday practice can be regarded as one of the distinguishing features of *any* genuine critical theory, it is hardly sufficient to individuate critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and Left-Hegelianism. For example, both feminism and pragmatism understand their particular form of inquiry as embedded in the very social matrix that they take as their object. This is not just a methodological criterion, it is a normative criterion, as is evident in the primacy pragmatism accords to everyday practice, and in the feminist slogan 'the personal is the political'.

The problem with Honneth's appeal to the emancipatory potential within everyday social reality lies less in its inadequacy as a criterion for distinguishing a particular tradition of critical theory than in its foundationalist orientation, about which it is both normatively ambiguous and normatively inconsistent. The appeal to the everyday is normatively ambiguous because it is extremely unclear to what precisely the appeal is being made. Is the everyday supposed to represent some stable, historically unchanging normative bulwark of normative expectations and moral experience that is impervious to novelty, history, and contingency, playing a role in Honneth's theory analogous to the role that the 'lifeworld' plays in Habermas'? So it would seem, since Honneth regards 'feelings of injustice' such as shame, anger, and indignation, as historically constant "pretheoretical fact[s] on the basis of which a critique of the relations of recognition can identify its own theoretical perspective in social reality."¹⁵ But just *what* is a 'pretheoretical fact'? Does it refer to moral experiences that need no justification—to experiences that all by themselves provide "proof of the cogency of critique"?¹⁶ If that is the case, critique has little work to do short of providing empirically salient descriptions of such experiences: it need neither engage in interpretation nor in judgement, thereby absolving itself of any genuinely critical function. Of course, it is hard to imagine how such a 'critical' practice could get going in the first place, not least because moral experiences can rarely, if ever, be taken as 'pretheoretical' facts, the self-evident nature of which circumvents the need for interpretation, justification, or criticism. Simply put, the mere experience of shame, anger, or indignation is not in itself proof of anything. Such experiences can

be the source of illegitimate as much as legitimate demands for recognition: they do not decide the issue of their moral legitimacy in advance.

In his reply to Nancy Fraser's like-minded criticisms of his attempt to foundationalise pre-public or 'pre-political' experiences of injustice, Honneth claims not to be able to understand why anyone would object to attempts such as his to discover a 'unitary structure' amongst diverse feelings of injustice.¹⁷ What he seems not to recognise is that the theoretical urge to unify diversity and then to ground it in some transhistorical, transcultural moral phenomenon risks not only distorting some moral feelings and excluding others, it also substantialises the chosen ones, treating what is alterable and possibly contingent as something fixed, constant, inescapable. Like Habermas, he is of the view that all that is required to safeguard such unifying gestures from philosophical immodesty is that they proceed fallibilistically, as though all the attendant risks were merely 'metaphysical', and could thereby be effectively disarmed. And like Habermas, Honneth does not see that the very drive to unify and foundationalise is itself in need of further reflection and critical scrutiny.

But there is still more that is normatively ambiguous about Honneth's appeal to the everyday. It is also ambiguous because Honneth slides between an appeal to the everyday that is construed quasi-anthropologically and one that is construed historically. In this case, as in the one before, the ambiguity is a function of a certain tension in the way that Honneth has sought to justify his model of critique. The tension arises from an indecisiveness or hesitation about which strategy of justification he wishes to pursue—whether, normatively speaking, he wishes to pursue a foundationalist or non-foundationalist strategy. Until quite recently, Honneth has been a normative foundationalist all the way, seeking to justify his concept of critique in terms of a 'weak, formalistic anthropology'—a weak theory of human nature.¹⁸ He now appears to be favouring a more historicist strategy of justification. But this apparent change of strategy only masks the difficulties. Close inspection of this more 'historicist' justification reveals it to be a very unconvincing (merely half-hearted) compromise between the foundationalist ambitions of Honneth's recognition theory and his (forced) concession to the anti-foundationalist temper of the times. In short, Honneth seems now to be stuck uncomfortably between two strategies of justification—between a philo-

sophical anthropology to which he cannot return and a philosophical modernism he cannot embrace.

As much as Honneth has tried to historicise the presuppositions or preconditions of 'human identity development', he remains committed to reformulating critical theory on the basis of "relatively stable expectations that we can understand as the subjective expression of imperatives of social integration."¹⁹ In his critical exchange with Fraser, Honneth claims that a model of critique that is content to anchor its normative standpoint in the present—in the contingent emancipatory social struggles of the present—will be blind to pre-articulated, pre-political experiences of social suffering and injustice. Only a normative paradigm that sets its foundations at least one level below history and contingency can remain alert to a wider range of human suffering and injustice, thereby transcending the limits of any immanent normative perspective into the nature (or 'grammar') of historically and culturally specific moral-political conflicts.²⁰

So as it turns out, Honneth wishes to qualify his normative foundationalism only to the extent that he can thereby mitigate certain objections to his stronger anthropological claims. The use of the slippery modifier 'relatively' is certainly a sign of his considerable equivocation on the matter. In any case, he is by no means prepared to accept any far-reaching historicist, or, worse yet, 'relativist', implications. All he is prepared to accept is the rather innocuous idea that such 'relatively stable expectations' as are necessary for self-realisation display a certain historical colour and cultural shape.²¹ That they may be radically altered or superseded is, however, a possibility that finds little *Lebensraum* in Honneth's normative paradigm. For, like Habermas, whose continuing influence on his theory construction is very much self-evident, Honneth appeals to a wholly artificial (apparently inexorable) logic of cultural differentiation, by which the three spheres of recognition—love, law, and achievement—achieve their 'breakthrough' with the emergence of modernity. Unfortunately, there is even less empirical support for this 'speculative' thesis than for the analogous thesis in Habermas' story about the differentiation of reason into three spheres of cultural action: science, morality, and art. The whiff of arbitrariness lingers, and lingers longest where the foundationalist impulse is strongest.

It is most unfortunate that Honneth has uncritically inherited Habermas' differentiation fetishism, together with the impossibly ambitious task of identifying *the* normative foundations of the social order as a whole. To my mind, this entire foundationalist enterprise takes as settled a question that has not been adequately raised, let alone tested: the question of whether 'relatively stable normative expectations' offer the *only* valuable resources for critique and progressive social change. Why are not new normative expectations and new normative challenges at least as important critical resources as 'relatively stable' normative expectations? When one considers this question in light of modernity's propensity for recurrent cultural crises and social breakdowns whose resolution and repair require new normative language, new social possibilities, new cultural practices, its pertinence becomes all the more visible. A critical project that is concerned exclusively with 'relatively stable normative expectations' may find that it lacks the resources for responding to times of crisis and normative disorientation. And if it is committed to the normative devaluation of newly arising needs and new historical possibilities, it may find itself completely unable to fulfil its obligations to its own time. In this respect, Honneth does not depart quite so boldly from Habermas' paradigm of critical theory, for he remains, like Habermas, very wary of the new, of contingency, and of historical change.

The second feature of Honneth's new theoretical initiative with which I am only partially sympathetic concerns his objections to Habermas' conception of reason and the role it is meant to play in social and cultural critique. Reiterating a criticism made in one of his earliest publications,²² Honneth expresses rather extreme dissatisfaction with Habermas' conception of reason—particularly, Habermas' historical-cum-evolutionary justification of his conception of reason in terms of a 'communicative rationalisation of the life-world'. In so far as this is conceived of as a socio-historical process that takes place behind the backs of social actors, Honneth's objection is understandable, for "its course is neither directed by human intentions nor can it be grasped within the consciousness of a single individual."²³

There are certainly some serious problems with Habermas' conception of reason—problems that are mostly a consequence of its uncompromisingly procedural character. But the narrowness of Habermas' conception of reason hardly justifies a complete break with critical theory's Left-Hegelian pre-

occupation with transforming the meaning of reason. If anything can be said to belong to critical theory's identity—at least, until now—it is this preoccupation with critically transforming the meaning of reason, and thereby the normative substance of critique. This preoccupation is one which critical theory can trace back to its conceptual and normative roots in Kant and Hegel. So what can be gained from such an abrupt break with critical theory's past? Can the proposed change of normative paradigm from reason to self-realisation deliver normative resources that exceed the critical potential of reason? Can the turn to self-realisation provide a normative perspective from which we can formulate a more effective response to the decline of cultural self-confidence and to the foreclosure of the future?

My worry is that Honneth's well-intentioned reformulation of critical theory will deplete rather than replenish its critical content. Indeed, I very much doubt that he can sustain this break and at the same time present his project as both a continuation and renewal of critical theory. Any deep break in a tradition of inquiry faces the problem of how to reintegrate in new form that from which it has broken. In Honneth's case, the break in question raises the problem of how to re-inherit critical theory's Left-Hegelian legacy. Given the nature of the break Honneth has proposed, that problem is almost dissolved, since Honneth's proposal leaves us with so very little of that legacy to inherit. The normative and conceptual impoverishment of a tradition of inquiry is not a price that should be too readily paid at any time. Honneth tries to justify the price of his change of normative paradigm with the promise of an enlarged field of inquiry. However, Honneth's attempt to counteract the 'rationality-theoretic narrowing of social critique' seems destined to share in the fate from which it seeks to escape. Even if we were to concede Honneth's point concerning the narrowness of the Left-Hegelian concern with the 'pathologies' of reason, an equally narrow, if not even narrower, concern with the 'pathologies' of self-realisation can hardly be described as theoretical gain. But this is not all. By abandoning the normativity of reason for the normativity of self-realisation, Honneth has cut the normative and conceptual links between reason and critique, without which his paradigm cannot successfully function as a *critical* theory.²⁴

These are the central claims of my paper, and I will try to defend them in detail in the next three sections of my paper. In sections III and IV, I will focus

on the problems besetting Honneth's attempt to reformulate social criticism in connection with a formal theory of the good. In section V, I will raise some Hegelian and Heideggerian objections to Honneth's reinterpretation of freedom as self-realisation, and to his over-reaching theory of recognition. Finally in section VI, I will very briefly outline an alternative conception of critical theory motivated by the need to respond effectively to the decline of cultural self-confidence, the exhaustion of utopian energies, and the apparent foreclosure of the future.

II. Grounding Critique in a Formal Theory of the Good

The next step in Honneth's proposal to renew critical theory was not taken in its name, but in the name of an urgent need to reformulate the task of social philosophy. This move is not as unusual as it might seem, since both Horkheimer and Habermas also developed their conception of critical theory in connection with a renewal of social philosophy. In a fascinating essay, Honneth claims that social philosophy no longer possesses a distinctive identity.²⁵ At best, it has become indistinguishable from moral and political philosophy; and at worst, it has been reduced to a minor sub-field of political philosophy. In response to this apparently unhappy circumstance, Honneth sets out to reformulate the task of social philosophy in a way that restores its independence from moral and political philosophy, and makes possible the re-appropriation of its dispossessed identity.

Now there is more to this move than the desire to follow in the footsteps of his eminent predecessors.²⁶ Honneth wishes to accomplish two things. First, he wants to reshape critical theory in the image of his preferred philosophical discipline; and second, he wants to redefine this discipline in sharp contrast to political philosophy. Distinguishing social philosophy from political philosophy allows Honneth to distinguish his own conception of critical theory from Habermas', since Habermas' conception is now largely indistinguishable from current liberal theories of justice. (For terminological convenience and clarity, I therefore ask the reader to understand Honneth's conception of social philosophy as synonymous with his conception of critical theory.)

By means of historical and normative reconstruction, Honneth reformulates the task of social philosophy as the diagnosis of the *pathologies* of social life. Unlike political philosophy, social philosophy is not guided by an interest in

determining the conditions of a correct or just social order; rather, it is guided by an interest in determining the conditions that structurally impede or enable human self-realisation. Thus, for Honneth, the normative criteria of social philosophy, and thus of critical theory, are essentially *ethical* criteria, formally determining the necessary conditions of the 'good life' or 'successful form of life'.²⁷

To ground his formal conception of self-realisation, Honneth draws a sharp form/content distinction. It is a strategy of justification that he borrows from Habermas. Whereas Habermas employs a very sharp form/content distinction to distinguish a universalistic concept of justice from particular conceptions of the good life, Honneth employs it to distinguish culturally and historically variable instances or interpretations of the good life from the formal conditions invariably necessary for its realisation. Now it is tough enough to defend this sharp form/content distinction when trying to justify a universalistic conception of justice; it is all that much tougher to defend such a distinction to justify a universalistic conception of the good.

Immediately at issue is the question of whether it is possible to establish formal conditions of the good life without an implicit or disguised appeal to some particular conception of the good life. Not least of the seemingly insurmountable problems such an attempt must confront, is the problem of demonstrating the cultural and historical invariability of the ideal of self-realisation itself. This is not a problem that Honneth can ignore, since the normative status ascribed to self-realisation presumes that it is not just a modern or Western ideal. Moreover, he has to find some convincing way of making the ideal of self-realisation universalisable without rendering it normatively bland and critically blunt. Honneth, however, proceeds by presuming what he has to prove: that the idea of 'self-realisation' is the highest of all human goods, and not just one of a number of important goods to which members of modern societies owe their self-understanding and their often conflicting allegiances. It goes without saying that successfully institutionalising the preconditions of 'self-realisation' is an essential piece of a democratic culture's self-image; what does not go without saying is that this is the highest good that such a culture can or must espouse. Not only is it just one aspect (and a contestable aspect at that) of modern freedom, it is also in tension with other desired goods—equality, solidarity, cultural continuity, novelty.

Honneth is decidedly vague as to what he actually means by self-realisation. Since he is interested only in specifying the formal conditions of self-realisation, not any specific conception of self-realisation, this lack of clarity is deliberate. Yet, it is obvious that his conception is indebted both to a quasi-Aristotelian notion of 'human flourishing' (*eudaimonia*) and to a notion of psychological 'well-being' or 'health'.²⁸ Thus, he is unable to disarm the well-founded suspicion that his formal conditions already suppose and are already shaped by a very particular conception of the good, and, indeed, of 'well-being' and psychological 'health'.

This point brings me to a second problem with Honneth's attempt to arrive at a universalistic conception of the good. Although well aware of the cultural and historical variability of particular conceptions of the good, he seems to be unaware that the normative content of ideas of the good are both more indeterminate and heterogeneous than his formal construal of them allows. By the *indeterminacy* of the good, I am referring to the way in which ideas of the good resist theoretical attempts—such as Honneth's—to make their normative content fully explicit. This resistance is, in part, a function of the fact that ideas of the good guide our access to our ideals, value standards, to our self-understanding, in general. It is also a function of the fact that ideas of the good contain a normative surplus of meaning that cannot be exhausted—either in any single interpretation of the good or in any attempt to state the necessary and sufficient conditions for its flourishing. From the irreducible indeterminacy of the good—an indeterminacy that is essential to the very idea of the good—it follows that we cannot establish or 'know' the independent conditions of the good's realisation. We are not dealing here with some determinate object 'out there' whose conditions of possibility can be exhaustively stated: the conditions under which an idea of the good can be realised are internal, not external to the good. Since the conditions under which an idea of the good can be realised are not formally independent of the good itself, the sharp form/content distinction Honneth draws is untenable. Moreover, since the critical potential of any idea of the good is internal, not external to the good, the misguided attempt to derive standards of critique from the putative 'formal' conditions of the good will prove fruitless, particularly in light of the fact that Honneth also wants to squeeze substantive content out of this merely formal idea of the good.²⁹

The problems attending Honneth's inattentiveness to the indeterminacy of ideas of the good are compounded by his inattentiveness to the *heterogeneity* (and not just diversity) of ideas of the good. Although it remains at the level of an implicit assumption, Honneth understands self-realisation as a good that exhibits a relatively homogeneous and stable structure. But the meaning of any particular conception of the good not only varies across historical time and cultural space; its meaning can be, and frequently is, vehemently contested within its own historical time and cultural context. Over the course of the last two centuries, it has become especially clear the extent to which ideas of the good can be placed under critical scrutiny, revealing not just their contestability, but also their instability. Under the mounting pressure of critique, ideas of the good must be renewed by new interpretations and justifications if they are to enjoy continued allegiance. In the case of the ideal of self-realisation, Honneth does not sufficiently appreciate the degree to which the plural meanings of this ideal undermine the normative stability he ascribes to it. A 'formal' conception of the good cannot overcome this stubborn fact. More troublesome still is the possibility that *any* conception of the good may be challenged to such an extent that its status as an idea of the good can be considerably devalued or simply discredited.

This possibility exposes yet another assumption of Honneth's understanding of self-realisation: the assumption that conflicting conceptions of self-realisation are ultimately reconcilable with one another. The problems that arise from this false assumption become even clearer when we consider not just the heterogeneity and conflict among different construals of one and the same good, but also the heterogeneity and conflict among different goods. Unlike Honneth, with whom he shares an interest in an 'ethics of authenticity' and in the centrality of practices of recognition, Charles Taylor is extremely alert to the potentially tragic, but inescapable conflicts that can arise among the diverse goods that have claimed the allegiance of modern subjects. By their very nature, such goods—'hypergoods', in Taylor's terminology—are conflict generating. First of all, because they stand in an agonistic relation to other 'hypergoods', and second, because they provide the evaluative standpoint by which competing 'hypergoods' are judged.³⁰

Honneth sidesteps both of these issues by treating self-realisation as a homogeneous good, and as the highest good. Other goods are either subsumed by,

or are made instrumental to, self-realisation. Given the urgency of these very modern issues, Taylor, for his part, has spent considerable intellectual energy trying to reconceive practical reason, such that we might trust in its capacity to arbitrate between conflicting conceptions of the good, not by appeal to some trans-historical standard, but by drawing upon the purely internal devices of comparative and retrospective evaluation. Already, then, we encounter one of the very serious consequences of Honneth's change of orientation from the normativity of reason to the normativity of self-realisation. Not only has Honneth put all his normative eggs in one basket, the basket of a disputable understanding of the meaning of modern freedom, he has also failed to appreciate the problem of 'deep diversity', and, thereby, the failure to develop a conception of practical reason or practical discourse that could play a mediating or arbitrating role in conflicts between 'hypergoods'. Lacking such a conception, Honneth is unable to theorise how modern subjects can themselves rationally evaluate the differences between, and cooperatively determine their relation to, conflicting conceptions of the good. Of course, his preference for a formal (that is, universalistic) theory of the good is based on the false assumption that reason cannot otherwise arbitrate between competing conceptions of the good.

It is neither necessary nor advisable to follow a universalistic strategy of justification in order to defend the critical potential ideas of the good. A good that has no significant content has no critical potential. It is not only possible, but in many ways preferable, to employ comparative and retrospective methods of justification to establish the superiority of one conception of the good *vis á vis* another.³¹ Ideas of the good do not need to be universalised to provide sufficient normative power for social criticism; quite the contrary, the attempt to universalise ideas of the good renders them less rather than more effective for purposes of social criticism. Comparative and retrospective methods of justification can illuminate the gain in understanding that follows the transition from one cultural self-understanding to another. As a strategy for justifying appeal to ideas of the good it is not self-undermining in the way that both relativistic and universalistic strategies of justification are: the former because it denies the possibility of context-transcendence as such, the latter because it claims to transcend all possible contexts.

Unfortunately, Honneth cannot escape the grip of this false opposition, since he believes that defending the idea of progress requires rejecting any strong

claims about the contingency and alterability of human practices. But the unwelcome consequence he fears—that every evaluative predicate ever to have emerged in history has the same normative validity—is not a consequence of the recognition of contingency and alterability of human practices; it is a consequence of not being able to see that there is nothing about the contingency and alterability of human practices that entails the reduction of ‘every evaluative predicate’ to the ‘same normative validity’. How many times must this be pointed out? Just because we cannot have an independent external standard to which we can appeal across the shifting sands of historical time and cultural space by no means entail that ‘every evaluative predicate’ is equally valid! This fallacious argument can hardly justify the attempt to derive ‘trans-historical standards’ of evaluation and justification from some favoured (that is, question-begging, ultimately, Platonist) interpretation of history.³² Surely, we can explore other ways of conceiving social progress, other ways of regarding change in which we can identify some kind of gain in understanding, that do not arise from an exaggerated fear of scepticism, the response to which only strengthens the sceptical implications that it was meant to disarm. The possibilities of comparative and retrospective methods of evaluation and justification are a much more promising alternative to the endless and fruitless debate between universalism and relativism, foundationalism and scepticism. That such methods cannot promise to deliver a final judgment on what is gained and lost in the course of human history may in fact be one of their many intellectual and moral virtues.

III. Medicalising Critique

Since the normative substance of Honneth’s notion of self-realisation consists of a psychological theory of ‘well-being’ or ‘intact personal identity’, it will not seem far-fetched to think of critique as akin to medical diagnosis, and to think of the social critic as the physician of culture. Obviously, any talk about distinctively ‘social pathologies’ rests on some kind of analogy between medical and social pathology. Honneth makes the analogy very explicit, construing the formal conditions of human self-realisation as analogous to a medical model of social normality and health. Just as medicine diagnoses an illness that strikes the human organism by appeal to a clinical representation of a healthy, normal organism, likewise social philosophy should be able to diagnose the ‘abnormal’ states of social life. Although apparently aware of

the myriad problems this particular endeavour also poses for his proposal, Honneth nonetheless insists on the possibility of formally specifying a social analogue of normality and health in terms of culturally and historically independent conditions of human self-realisation. With these in hand, social philosophy will possess a culturally neutral representation of social health that can serve as a scale against which to measure 'abnormal' social states.³³

A number of obvious and not so obvious objections can be raised here. Some would be corollaries of the objections to a universalistic ethic of the good life, and some would take the form of understandable worries about the very idea of fixing the meaning of 'social normality'. As regards the latter, the historical investigations of Foucauldians and feminists, among others, have produced compelling evidence of just how repressive can be the intended and unintended effects of any attempt to fix the meaning of 'normal' and 'healthy'. My more immediate concern here is the extent to which Honneth unjustifiably medicalises the activity of critique and the objects of critique. It is of course difficult to avoid this medicalising tendency—a tendency that has been deeply ingrained, but never convincingly justified in the various critiques of modern forms of life. Perhaps, this medicalised form of social criticism is also something that begins with Rousseau.³⁴ Whatever the case may be, important methodological and normative considerations enjoin us to eschew and counteract this approach.

For example, Honneth gives the unfortunate impression that once social philosophy comes to possess a culturally neutral representation of social health, the diagnosis of social pathologies will be a rather straightforward affair. There is no indication given that the diagnosis of 'social pathologies' as much as the diagnosis of organic pathologies involves *reflective*, not determinant judgement—and as such, moves from particular to general, rather than the other way around (as does all successful social criticism). What distinguishes the diagnostic skills of good physicians is their practical judgement, not their intimate acquaintance with their pathology textbook, the diagnostic conventions of which they must occasionally go against. This is particularly important for the diagnosis of new pathologies. And it is just as important for philosophers and social scientists engaged in diagnostic social criticism. During historical periods of rapid change and upheaval, new social phenomena may

emerge for which the current 'culturally neutral' basis for diagnosis will prove inadequate and thoroughly dated. Social critics cannot afford to miss the significance of new social phenomena, phenomena that are historically unique and unprecedented. As is often the case, such phenomena can play a double role: they can be interpreted as signs of social breakdown and they can offer a new normative standpoint for social critique. By construing the formal conditions of the good life in terms of a culturally neutral representation of social health, Honneth commits himself to an ahistorical and undynamic view of social forms of life. And though the whole approach is meant to enable a critical diagnosis of the historical present, it renders historically insignificant the very present it is to diagnose. Once again, we encounter another instance of the normative devaluation of the present, of a refusal of the critical potential contained in 'modernity's consciousness of time'. (This term of art was introduced by Habermas to account for an epochally distinctive temporal orientation of modernity: its openness to the 'novelty of the future'.³⁵ Its implications for the renewal of critical theory are both broad and deep, and I shall be briefly discuss these in the last section of my paper.)

Even if we still wish to think of social philosophy as a form of diagnostic social critique, the analogy to medicine should not be pressed too far—if it is to be pressed at all. There may be something quite wrong, dangerous, even 'unhealthy', with criticism that medicalises social phenomena. First of all, such a move raises questions about how it is that the social critic is herself not susceptible to the pathologies she diagnoses. A doctor who has contracted cancer can still diagnose cancer in one of her patients without raising the suspicion that her diagnosis is ideologically influenced by her own cancerous condition. But a social critic cannot enjoy the same objective distance from the phenomena she is supposed to diagnose, for the objectivity of social criticism is not something that can be taken for granted or permanently achieved. In the absence of any clarification of the matter, Honneth gives the impression that he is prepared to defend the claim that the social critic and physician occupy methodologically analogous positions, that they equally enjoy an epistemologically privileged position in relation to the 'afflicted'. This is a rather peculiar claim to make, given Honneth's insistence that critique needs to rediscover "an element of its own critical viewpoint within social reality"—within the "social culture of everyday life."

But then how is the validity of a critical social diagnosis to be determined? Can social philosophers alone determine it, or must this determination require the participation of all those possibly affected by their diagnoses. For reasons that are never made clear, but which are surely connected to his normative foundationalism, Honneth believes that social philosophy would ‘effectively be dissolved’ as an autonomous theoretical undertaking were the members of a concrete society to decide for themselves what counts as ‘pathological’ in their form of social life.³⁶ But what is the evidence for such a belief? Why would the transfer of its diagnostic insights to a democratically organised process of reflection and evaluation be a source of worry about the very possibility of social philosophy as an autonomous theoretical enterprise? Much more likely to dissolve the enterprise of social philosophy is an inability to generate insights into the causes of the ‘social pathologies’ it purports to diagnose. It is hardly self-evident that a theoretical enterprise capable of generating genuine insights is faced with extinction merely because the ultimate worth of its insights cannot be decided by itself alone. After all, the very nature of such insights requires the reflective endorsement of those whose lives they are supposed to illuminate and transform. And these insights can only prove their worth by making a genuine difference to practice—the touchstone of their problem-clarifying or problem-solving power. Once again we see the price Honneth must pay for failing to combine his conception of social philosophy with a complementary conception of practical reason in which social philosophy’s diagnoses are collectively tested and confirmed. In this case Honneth’s failure leaves him open to the charge that his conception of social philosophy not only displays a puristic conception of theory, but that it also harbours a latent scepticism towards practical reason and democracy, more typical of (but not exclusive to) elitist critics of democracy.

As it consists of an ineliminable interpretative dimension, and as it instances the practical judgement of the social philosopher, any diagnostic social criticism will be contested and scrutinised—and not only by other social philosophers and social critics. If a physician tells us that we have cancer, we can get a second or third opinion about it, but ultimately the confirmation of the cancer does not depend on our assent or agreement. On the other hand, the insights of critique needs to be endorsed by those to whom it is addressed, and this must be done under the right social conditions—that is, through an inclusive and highly reflective practical discourse. Although the endorsement

of its addressees is a necessary condition of the validity of any critical insight, it is not a sufficient condition of validity. For various independent reasons and social circumstances, the collective addressees of social critique may not be ready or inclined to accept it. Conversely, mere acceptance is also not a sufficient condition of validity. Once again, independent reasons and social circumstances may play a role in the acceptance of social criticism that turns out to be incorrect. Nevertheless, diagnostic social critique can never become an effective instrument of democratically achieved social change unless those to whom it is addressed reflectively endorse it.

The temptation to medicalise social criticism is understandable; but it is not by any means a harmless temptation. Certainly, German philosophy since Nietzsche has been particularly tainted by an unreflective and unchecked employment of a medicalised vocabulary of social and cultural critique. Given the unwarranted presuppositions and undesirable implications of such a term of art, it might seem altogether for the best if we completely removed it from our critical vocabulary. Welcome as this might be, it is nevertheless extremely difficult if not impossible completely to demedicalise critique, since there is almost always something 'clinical' about the very nature of the intuitions that inform social and cultural criticism. But there are considerably weaker, much less dangerous medical metaphors upon which we can draw—for example, the notions of crisis and breakdown. We can fruitfully employ these concepts because they are not heavily burdened with connotations of sickness and abnormality. The unavoidable breakdowns and crises that can occur in any form of social life should not be treated as a 'pathological' condition that requires medical intervention. Rather, they should be treated as signs of something gone wrong *and* as harbingers of new sociocultural possibilities, both of which it is the task of critique to disclose.

Though fascinating and occasionally illuminating, Honneth's historical reconstruction of social philosophy gives the rather misleading impression that its essential normative concern is with the diagnosis of social pathologies that impede self-realisation. This is not only disputable; in a number of cases, it is altogether false. For instance, if Nietzsche's analysis of the cultural conditions of nihilism is correct, then the response it calls for involves much more than a determination of the formal conditions necessary for individual self-realisation. Among other things, Nietzsche's analysis points to the need to

regenerate the semantic contents of culture that the 'Enlightenment project' has eroded, and continues to erode. Under such cultural conditions, nothing can be taken for granted, and nothing can evade suspicion, since nihilism is supposed to be the event in which all the highest ideals devalue themselves—including ideals such as self-realisation. In other words, if Nietzsche's diagnosis is correct, then Honneth's appeal to the ideal of self-realisation as the normative standpoint from which critical social diagnoses are to proceed, is made without fully comprehending the implications of Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism, which anticipates the extent and depth of the sceptical mood which envelops both 'high' and 'low' culture today.

Whether Nietzsche's critique of modernity is correct is not the issue here, however. At issue is whether the selectivity of Honneth's historical reconstruction results in an unwarranted and unwelcome attenuation of social philosophy's (and, therefore, critical theory's) normative horizon. Unquestionably, that is precisely what follows from Honneth's narrow focus on self-realisation. The explanation of this narrow focus lies in Honneth's desire to see the practice of critique unified under a single normative standpoint, which desire is an expression of Honneth's normative monism as well as his normative foundationalism. Unfortunately, the normative unity he claims to find across the tradition of critique from Rousseau to Habermas is so tenuous and so thinly stretched that it easily snaps when critically probed. This is not just because the ideal of self-realisation is normatively overburdened; it is also impossible to unify such normatively disparate perspectives as those that make possible Hegel's, Nietzsche's, Arendt's, Foucault's, and Habermas' critiques of modern forms of social life. Honneth's artificial unification of these critiques ends up suppressing the normatively *plural* character of social criticism.

Sensitivity to the matter of cultural pluralism has an additional implication for the renewal of critical theory. Critical theory must become normatively as well as methodologically pluralistic: it can no more settle into one kind of inquiry than it can settle for already available possibilities. Normative and methodological pluralism entails disciplinary pluralism. Critical theory neither requires nor possesses a distinct disciplinary identity—whether philosophical or social-scientific. In many respects, critical theory is a 'homeless' form of inquiry. Whatever professional disadvantages such a circumstance

may have, its homelessness also confers upon it a decided advantage: it is in a position to make a temporary home for itself in whichever discipline(s) of philosophy or the social sciences it needs in order to fulfil its obligations to its own time. Of course, in making itself at 'home' in one of these disciplines, critical theory cannot let itself become too settled in any of them. Thus, I completely disagree with Honneth's attempt to find a home for critical theory in social philosophy. The practice of critique does not belong to, is not the property of, any one philosophical (or social science) discipline, be it social philosophy, political philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, the philosophy of language, or anything else. Any one of these philosophical disciplines can be, and has been, put in the service of critique.³⁷ No single philosophical discipline can legitimately claim for itself a special expertise in the practice of critique simply in virtue of its disciplinary identity.

Honneth's one-sided reformulation of the task of social philosophy results in an unjustifiable constriction of critical focus upon a very narrow range of 'social pathologies'—precisely the consequence that he claimed to be the principal shortcoming of Habermas' model of critique. Surely, the structural impediments to individual self-realisation cannot be the *only* concern of critique. Among other things, there is a need to illuminate and explain a much wider and more diverse range of crises and breakdowns: political, cultural, economic, environmental, and the like. There is also a need to illuminate and explain crises that arise from the depletion of the semantic resources of cultural traditions and social practices, including the practice of social criticism. And, in general, there is a need to illuminate and explain the crises and breakdowns that are the outcome of a partial or one-sided institutionalisation of reason, freedom, justice, progress, and other normative ideals.

Critique is obligated to do more than to understand and explain social breakdowns and cultural crises; it needs also to identify the potentially transformative possibilities that can emerge from them. In other words, it is hardly enough to take notice of phenomena that one is theoretically guided to expect; one must take notice of what is unexpected, that for which no theory can prepare the social critic. Philosophers such as Rousseau, Hegel, Nietzsche, Arendt, and Taylor, not only have an interest in something akin to what Honneth calls self-realisation. They also have an interest in cultural and normative change, cultural and normative renewal—an interest in how human

beings can initiate a change in their social practices and self-understanding, which change they can ascribe to their own self-conscious activity. The question of cultural and normative renewal is a very different question from the quasi-anthropological and quasi-transcendental question that preoccupies Honneth. It is not the question of identifying the single normative source of the 'moral order' of society; rather it is the question of how to get right the proportion of continuity and discontinuity in the form of life we inherit and pass on. Actually, it is two questions at once: the question of how to continue our form of life and the question of how to begin it anew. To ask the question of how to continue our form of life—what to keep going, what to abandon, is necessarily to contend with the question of how to renew it. This essential—to my mind, the most essential—normative source of social criticism is not only largely absent from Honneth's reconstruction of social philosophy, but from his conception of critique in general. I shall come back to this point in the last section of my paper. But first I wish to discuss the shortcomings of Honneth's rather un-Hegelian concept of recognition, a further consequence of failing sufficiently to preserve the normativity of reason within the framework of his recognition theory.

IV. Freedom as Self-Realisation, Recognition as Affirmation

In his Spinoza lectures Honneth tries to reinterpret Hegel's theory of freedom as the precursor to his own conception of freedom as self-realisation. "Hegel begins from the self-realisation of the individual, in order to derive from the (pre-) conditions for such self-realisation a definition of the task of the modern legal order."³⁸ I think this reading is far too selective and, thereby, mistaken, since it interprets in an unacceptably individualistic way Hegel's far richer and more complex view of human freedom. Hegel does not begin from the self-realisation of the individual; rather, he begins from a two-sided relation comprising one's relation to oneself, and one's relation to others. For Hegel, freedom exists when this two-sided relationship is such that one can 'be with oneself in one's other' (*in seinem Anderen bei sich selbst zu sein*). What this being oneself in one's other might mean is far more indeterminate than Honneth acknowledges. That it can be simply taken to mean something like self-realisation seems to me to be altogether unpersuasive and unwelcome.³⁹

From Fichte to Heidegger there have been a number of attempts to rethink the meaning of self-determining freedom as involving this two-sided relation to one's self and to one's other.⁴⁰ For Hegel, as for Heidegger, freedom as self-determination requires more than autonomous judgement and action; it requires that an agent be able to experience her speech and action as her *own*. But Hegel saw much more perspicuously than Heidegger that being able to experience one's speech and action *as* one's own will require a relation of reciprocal recognition between oneself and others.⁴¹ What can count as mine, as freely willed by me, cannot be counted as *my* own, were it not for others in reciprocal relation to whom *I* am able to distinguish and confirm that it *is* my own. All this ideally supposes a social world within which one can be identified as the one who one is; a world, in turn, with which one can identify, and, thereby, a world *for* which and *to* which one is accountable.

To avoid assimilating Hegel's view of freedom into one more individualistic construal of the meaning of freedom, we need to approach it from the right interpretative angle, an angle Hegel provides in a passage from §7 of the introduction to *The Philosophy of Right*.⁴² There we find that 'to be with oneself in one's other' involves *self-limitation*. More precisely, it involves *freely* willed self-limitation in relation to the other, since it is only "*in this limitation*" that we can come to recognise, to know ourselves "*as ourselves*."⁴³ Of course, self-limitation in Hegel, as in Kant, involves a connection to reason. In contrast to Kant, however, self-limitation in Hegel is conceived not as a repressive, but as an *expressive* act of reason, for it does not depend upon an opposition between nature and freedom. Thus, self-limitation is not supposed to culminate in self-alienation, but in the creation of a social world in which one can be 'at home'. (Whatever being 'at home' might mean, it should not mean a world in which the question of what it is to be 'at home' is settled once and for all, nor should it mean a world in which being 'at home' is equivalent to being 'settled'.)

In any case, the most distinctive element of Hegel's conception of human freedom arises not only from his incorporation of the role of recognition, but also from his incorporation of the role of reason *in* relations of recognition. In this respect, Hegel remains a Kantian, for he is committed to preserving the intimacy between, the identity of, reason and freedom.⁴⁴ The act of self-limitation is both a cognitive and an affective act: it moves within an

enlargeable space of reasons. Moreover, the question of what any particular act of recognition is supposed to achieve remains open, and that is because it is not knowable or decidable in advance. By contrast, Honneth's construal of freedom as self-realisation, and of self-realisation as the highest good, forces him to render relations of recognition instrumental to individual self-realisation. Thus, they have a pre-determined purpose in the order of recognition, and the order of recognition pre-determines the order of reasons. Although he explicitly denies that his theoretical approach instrumentalises recognition, Honneth's attempt to rebut this charge by treating the demand or need to recognise the other's 'evaluative qualities' as a *moral* obligation is unconvincing, to say the least.⁴⁵ After all, the only justification that Honneth can offer for the specifically *moral* nature of this obligation is that it is necessary to, that it is a condition of, self-realisation. Once we identify one particular good as the 'hyper-good' towards which all others tend and in light of which all others are to be evaluated, the instrumentalisation of all other goods is simply inescapable.

If we recall Honneth's unfortunate attempt to medicalise the normative criteria of social criticism, we can now see that there is also an implicit medicalisation of relations of recognition. Because Honneth, like Taylor, understands the act of recognition as synonymous with an act of affirmation, and because he understands affirmation as both a necessary and sufficient condition of an intact personal identity, acts of misrecognition or the denial of recognition must be regarded as "damaging" to "the individual's identity-formation."⁴⁶ When the act of recognition is so closely identified with affirmation, any critical challenge to one's identity claims would have to be understood as an attempt to deny not just a rightful entitlement, but a *vital* psychological-cum-anthropological need. The correction of unjust practices of misrecognition or disrespect requires affirmation or confirmation of some heretofore devalued quality. Due recognition is either justifiably given or unjustifiably withheld (leaving aside the inadequately answered question of how such claims are publicly justified); but always what it is that is given or withheld is the affirmation of some qualities or attributes of individuals or groups through the use of a positive evaluative predicate. Our offer of such a positive evaluative predicate is meant to undo the harm, repair the damage done.

So what we have here is a view of recognition that construes its essential purpose as providing some degree of *immunity* as insurance against the unpredictability of the future, against chance and contingency, against challenge and criticism. This view of recognition as an act of affirmation is not only evident in Honneth's account of affective recognition in the intimate sphere of the family, but also in his account of achievement in the public sphere: it is a tendency that pervades his entire normative framework.⁴⁷ By equating recognition with affirmation, Honneth effectively neutralises the future as source of disruption and of novelty. Moreover, this equation restricts, if not altogether precludes, the role that normative challenge (*Aufforderung*) and critique can play within practices of recognition, a role that both Fichte and Hegel considered to be essential to the successful practice of recognition.

We are now a long way from Hegel's conception of freedom as a state in which one is 'oneself with one's other'. One arrives at this state through cognitive and affective acts of self-limitation, an act by which one renders oneself open to the normative challenge of the other, open and vulnerable to criticism and change. By assimilating the meaning of freedom to self-realisation Honneth can't but assimilate recognition to affirmation. All this, of course, is a function of Honneth's anthropological starting point which requires that he tailor his theory to "subjects' normative expectations regarding the recognition of their personal integrity."⁴⁸ These 'relatively stable expectations' must then be understood as "the subjective expression of imperatives of social integration."⁴⁹ It is thus a starting point that establishes the priority of social integration to social change, and the priority of 'relatively stable expectations' to new normative expectations, restricting in advance the normative resources of social criticism to just such occasions as those in which one can rightfully appeal to incorrectly or inadequately applied principles of recognition.⁵⁰

By way of contrast, let us now consider the most famous example of the *Kampf um Anerkennung* in the history of philosophy—the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* analysis of the dialectic of mastery and slavery. There is much more going on in Hegel's analysis than the breakdown of relations of recognition between two agents who demand recognition from, but refuse to confer it upon, one another. Indeed, there is more going on than the dialectical drama in which the principal actors will—eventually—realise that the recognition

they each seek can only be satisfied under conditions of mutual and reciprocal recognition between—and only between—equals. The loser's breakdown, the crisis of self-understanding that grips him when he discovers that he prefers life to honour, certainly eventuates in humiliation, disrespect, and an asymmetrical relation to the 'master'. However, this breakdown, this crisis of self-understanding, also presents the 'slave' with the unforeseeable occasion as well as the unexpected material for a new, previously unimaginable self-understanding, reconfiguring his relation to himself and his relation to his 'master'. Thus, the 'slave' is able—up to the internal limits of his specific socio-historical context—to rebuild his shattered identity, his sense of himself as a self-determining agent, an agent capable of experiencing his words and actions as his own, even under highly unfavourable, structurally restricted social conditions.

Now let's update this scenario, not as a confrontation between two honour-seeking agents in Greco-Roman antiquity, but as a critical exchange between agents in a modern, relatively egalitarian democracy struggling to make sense of and evaluate each other's identity claims. Under these more favourable social conditions, the self-critically transformative aspect of the 'struggle for recognition' can stand out all the more clearly when, for example, agent A does not receive from agent B the recognition to which he claims to be entitled. Instead of affirming A's identity, B challenges A's identity claims, not in order to preserve existing asymmetries of power, but in order to initiate individual and social change through a critical exchange between equals (or unequal equals). Under such circumstances the crucial role of normative challenge and criticism in recognition struggles replaces the 'fight to the death'. Here it is no longer a struggle in which the winner takes all, but a struggle in which what is won is a change in self-understanding—a change in who one is, and how one lives. And such a change will also require a change in the normative language of evaluation. Thus, when the critique is viewed as internal to the 'struggle for recognition' we can see that recognition involves much more than, and often something quite different from, affirmation. Were we unable to see the role that critique plays in individual and social change, we would be unable to see that the struggle for recognition is also simultaneously a mutual struggle to articulate a new self-understanding and a new social structure in which the new self-understanding can be secured.

Clearly, the 'struggle for recognition' in this justifiably famous, but often misunderstood passage from the *Phenomenology* does not involve any 'pre-theoretical facts' that demand acknowledgement. Recognition in Hegel's sense is not reducible to respect for the rights of others any more than it is reducible to the affirmation of previously unappreciated or devalued ways of life. It involves much more: a learning process the outcome of which could not be foreseen or anticipated by either agent—a learning process that involves a process of re-learning, of re-cognition—that is, a process of *re-knowing* that enjoins mutual recognition and mutual transformation. Not only are we enjoined to re-know the other, we are enjoined to re-know ourselves—for example, to understand what it was that led us to misjudge or to misconstrue the other (such as cultural background assumptions and patterns of evaluation). Understood in this way, recognition preserves its connection to cognition—to cognitive and not just affective standards of judgment. Honneth's essentially non-cognitive construal of self-realisation and recognition cannot preserve the links between reason and freedom, without which critique must become a non-cognitive practice—which is to say, a practice in contradiction with itself.

Thus far, I have tried to distinguish Hegel's view of recognition from Honneth's. In one respect, however, both Honneth and Hegel fail to see that due recognition can function negatively as well as positively, that it can constrain as well as enable the realisation of human freedom—which is to say, even in its most enabling form, recognition can still constrain, even constrict our possible freedom. This is one of the most important insights that can be gleaned from the early Heidegger's analysis of *das Man*:⁵¹ even reciprocal relations of recognition can limit, disguise, or block certain freedom-enlarging possibilities. There are no social arrangements, no cultural transformation that can eliminate this possibility. There is a sense, then, in which all recognition contains a moment of potential, if not actual, misrecognition. Yet, Hegel understood better than Heidegger (and Rousseau) that relations of recognition (structures of intersubjectivity) are not only the source of the problem of 'mineness', but are also the source of its unavoidably *imperfect* solution. Anyone who hopes to advance the topic of recognition will need to take this Heideggerian point into account in order to fashion a more complex account of the relation between freedom and recognition than is currently available.⁵²

As it stands, Honneth's normative paradigm displays considerable overgeneralisation and over-reach—first of all, because it locates “the core of *all* experience of injustice in the denial of social recognition, in the phenomena of humiliation and contempt,”⁵³ and second, because it claims to find “a pervasive connection between *all* resistance to an established social order and the moral sense of not having received the recognition one has deserved.”⁵⁴ Clearly, the relevant sense of recognition that gives the point to these claims is of recognition as affirmation. But if, as I have argued, it is a mistake to interpret recognition in such a restrictive, self-undermining way, Honneth's claims stretch excessively the bounds of credibility. It would not take much to disprove them even if taken at face value, for surely there is not, normatively or empirically speaking, just *one* kind of injustice—no matter how internally differentiated. And just as surely, not *all* resistance to the established social order is motivated by the experience of non-recognition. If that were true, say, in some possible world, it would mean that once agents received the recognition owed them they would no longer have any reason, any motivation, to resist or criticise the established social order. In such a world, due recognition would not only bring an end to injustice, it would bring an end to history.

Once again, Honneth's normative monism, his insistence on viewing the social totality through the lens of single normative perspective, dramatically weakens the potential of his model of critique. In a rather single-minded effort to demonstrate that recognition (as affirmation) is the medicine for all that ails modern societies, Honneth fails to notice the internal limitations of recognition, even in its more capacious Hegelian version. At the same time, Honneth's normative standpoint is unable to bring to light social phenomena that block further individualisation, phenomena that have little or nothing to do with non-recognition or misrecognition. And just as in the case of his earlier attempt to derive normative criteria for the critical diagnosis of ‘social pathologies’ from a formal theory of the good, Honneth's current attempt to provide normative criteria for social criticism from his theory of recognition, turns the act of social criticism into an exercise in determinant judgement. Once the theory has incorporated the normative standards of correct social development into its basic concepts, all that “the evaluation of contemporary social conflicts requires . . . [is] a judgement of the normative potential of particu-

lar demands with regard to transformations that promise not only short-term improvement, but also allow us to expect a lasting rise in the moral level of social integration."⁵⁵ Thus, all that is required of successful social criticism is to determine whether the normative standards that are the prerequisite for all future moral development have been "incorrectly or inadequately applied."⁵⁶ But this cannot be what successful social criticism requires, since so much of what makes social criticism successful is the degree to which, on the one hand, it can disclose hidden or disguised processes, and on the other, it can disclose new or unnoticed possibilities.

To his credit, Honneth is admirably honest enough to thematise the question of just how much critical potential his recognition theory actually possesses. To ask that question, however, is to ask the question of what future possibilities it can disclose, in light of which it can engage in a practically effective critique of the present order. Here Honneth's normative standpoint is at a distinct disadvantage. Since it is a standpoint that presupposes the normative devaluation of the present, it cannot truly serve the needs of the present. Theoretically incapable of disclosing new possibilities, it can only restate existing possibilities. When it comes to defending the critical potential of his recognition theory, then, Honneth can offer little more than a variation on Habermas' familiar thesis of 'individualisation through socialisation'. Honneth projects into the future the expectation that as more aspects of personal identity come to be socially recognised (that is, affirmed and accepted,) a morally higher degree of social integration will be achieved.⁵⁷ In other words, the more equal the '(pre-) conditions' for self-realisation, the more moral the social integration and, therefore, the more stable the social order. "[F]rom now on, all subjects must have the same chance of individual self-realisation through shared conditions of recognition."⁵⁸

Who would not welcome this call to equalise opportunities for individual self-realisation? But is an equalisation of the chances for self-realisation the only possible engine of social change? Is it a prescription for social change as fundamentally different from liberal conceptions of individual freedom as Honneth claims—for example, Rorty's view of self-creation and Mill's view of liberty? If this is the vision of progress Honneth's model of critique is supposed to inspire, it can only disappoint. In this respect, Honneth offers nothing not already proposed by a long line of liberal theorists (from Mill to

Rawls) for whom constitutional design and individual rights are viewed as a means to maximise the possibilities for individuals to pursue their own conception of the good life. Honneth adds recognition rights to the basic package, but the vision of progress is fundamentally the same. And, unsurprisingly, it is as empty as Habermas' 'utopian' vision based on the 'formal aspects of an undamaged intersubjectivity'. What is more, it is a retrospective vision of progress. It does not look forward, but backwards, at already available possibilities. Under different historical conditions, this might be enough. But it is much less than is required under our historical conditions, conditions that are characterised by self-doubt and by a negatively-cathected relation to the future, as Habermas correctly observed quite some time ago.⁵⁹ If our cultural self-confidence is to be convincingly restored, if the future is to be reopened again, critique cannot afford to be merely retrospective: it must disclose alternative possibilities. And unless critique is able to reanimate the utopian energies upon which its own practice depends, its future will also be foreclosed.

V. The Idea of Critique Nourished on the Spirit of Modernity

I have argued that the normative shift from reason to self-realisation represents a deviation from rather than a continuation of critical theory. Perhaps, this outcome is less a function of normative orientation than of the unpromising situation in which critical theory finds itself today—the situation of having a past, but not a future. This is certainly not my view, but nevertheless I do believe the situation is grave. The current circumstances of critical theory—as of any model of critique—are such that its self-renewal depends on its capacity to respond to the contracting, negatively cathected future we all face. Critical theory cannot renew itself as a practically effective enterprise unless it takes on the task of disclosing alternative possibilities to the current social order. And if it is to be normatively consistent with critical theory's Left-Hegelian legacy, it will require regaining contact with modernity's heightened consciousness of time.

With this term of art we are referring to the peculiarly modern orientation to the future—an orientation to the novelty of the future. It is an orientation that seeks to keep perpetually open the promise of a future different from the past—the promise of a break with the past and the promise of a new

beginning. An unavoidable consequence of this future-oriented stance is that the present will be subject to historical crises which arise from the disorienting collision of old and new: the more open we are to discontinuity, the more we will have to contend with the problem of continuity. Thus, on each occasion in which modernity's time consciousness intensifies, we are pressed into evaluations and decisions concerning "the proportion of continuity and discontinuity in the forms of life we pass on."⁶⁰

A further consequence of modernity's time consciousness is the way in which the future functions as a source of pressure brought to bear on unsolved problems, on unrealised or unnoticed possibilities. Our open stance towards the future not only places possibility (ontologically) higher than actuality,⁶¹ and thereby renders our traditions and practices permanently vulnerable; it also places an almost unbearable sense of responsibility upon the present. If we are to respond authentically to our consciousness of historical time, we are compelled to take the ethical perspective of a historically accountable 'future present'. From this projected ethical perspective we come to recognise the past as the pre-history of the present, to which the present is connected "as by the chain of a continual destiny."⁶² Within this reinterpreted historical horizon, we bear a special responsibility: we are the ones who must repair what is broken, or break with what seems irreparable. We are the ones who must remake our languages and practices, and make something new out of something old.

By normatively devaluing the significance of the present, Honneth's model of critique shoves aside "just that element which had to matter most to modern consciousness—the transitory aspect of the moment, pregnant with meaning, in which the problems of an onrushing future are tangled in knots."⁶³ Honneth's proposed normative paradigm is just one more instance of the neglect and inconstancy that contemporary critical theory has demonstrated towards an essential element of the conceptual and normative constellation upon which its self-understanding depends: the "constellation among modernity, time-consciousness, and rationality."⁶⁴ Habermas identified these conceptual and normative relationships correctly, but he balked at their historicist, anti-foundationalist implications. Those of us who wish to renew critical theory can no longer afford to balk at these implications, but must work them out in a consistent, unflinching manner.

Though Habermas recognised the irreplaceable critical function of modernity's time-consciousness, he has been as unfaithful to it as most of his disciples. Nonetheless, the potential value of his observation concerning the contraction of the horizon of the future remains undiminished. If there is any chance of reigniting historical consciousness and utopian thought, it resides in the success with which critique can regain contact with modernity's consciousness of time. Only by regaining such contact will critique once again be nourished by "the spirit of modernity."⁶⁵ As a consequence, critical theory would no longer persist in thinking of modernity as a 'project' that can be finished. Under conditions of cultural pluralism and deep diversity, there can be no single emancipatory goal towards which, and in light of which, critique is oriented. Any attempt to renew "the idea of critique nourished on the spirit of modernity" cannot ignore this stubborn fact. But it is no obstacle to the reanimation of utopian energies or to the disclosure of alternative possibilities: the goal is not to prescribe a concrete, determinate utopia; the goal is to prevent the sceptical foreclosure of the future, to make it receptive to utopian hopes and expectations.⁶⁶

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Notes

* I want to express my thanks to the anonymous reader for the constructive criticisms and helpful suggestions. I hope I have done them justice.

¹ "Philosophy, working together with the reconstructive sciences, can only throw light on the situations in which we find ourselves. It can contribute to our learning to understand the ambivalences that we come up against as just so many appeals to increasing responsibilities within a contracting space of possibility." Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992, p. 146, translation altered. It is just this resignation to a 'contracting space of possibility' that concerns me.

² For an exemplary statement of this more pragmatic version of critical theory, see Thomas McCarthy's contribution to David Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1994.

³ Proposals for post-Habermasian models of critical theory by Jay Bernstein, James Bohman, Axel Honneth, Maeve Cooke, and Nikolas Kompridis are advanced in

“Critical Theory after Habermas,” a special issue of *The International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2005, Nikolas Kompridis, Guest Editor.

⁴ Examples of this turn in recent critical theory are Martin Seel’s *Versuch über die Form des Glücks*, Alessandro Ferrara’s *Reflective Authenticity*, Christoph Menke’s, *Tragödie im Sittlichkeit*, and Axel Honneth’s *The Struggle for Recognition*.

⁵ I shall be referring to the following texts:

Axel Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Situation of Critical Theory Today,” in *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, vol. 1, no. 2, October, 1994, p. 264.

Axel Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy,” in ed. David Rasmussen, *Handbook of Critical Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 369-398.

Axel Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 2000.

Axel Honneth, “Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser,” in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London, Verso, 2003.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1987, p. 139.

⁷ Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect,” p. 264.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 257.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹² “The emancipatory process in which Habermas anchors the normative perspective of critical theory is not at all reflected as such an emancipatory process in the moral experiences of the subjects involved; for they experience an impairment of what we can call their moral experiences, that is, their ‘moral point of view’, not as a restriction of intuitively mastered rules of language, but as a violation of identity claims acquired in socialisation” (Honneth, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect,” p. 261). This claim is obviously contestable in so far as unwarranted restrictions upon the exchange of reasons can be experienced as violations of one’s right to speak, one’s right to defend and criticise claims. This is a morally unjustifiable exclusion from the public space of reason and justification. However, I am not interested in assessing the accuracy of Honneth’s claim here, since the doubts I have about it are not my primary concern in this paper.

¹³ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutman, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 25. Though Honneth may choose, rightly or wrongly, to disassociate his normative standpoint from the ‘politics of recognition’, he cannot deny that much of the initial appeal of his theory depends

on the light it promises to shed on the very empirical phenomena from which he wishes to disconnect it.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect," p. 263.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁷ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 246. Fraser regards it as a moral variant of the epistemological 'myth of the given', *Redistribution or Recognition*, pp. 201-211.

¹⁸ Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social," p. 394.

¹⁹ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 174.

²⁰ It is this preoccupation with the contingent social struggles of the present that Honneth identifies as one of the two telling differences between his normative paradigm and that of Fraser's. See "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," in *Redistribution or Recognition*, pp. 114-134.

²¹ For Honneth, "it is still a matter of the invariant dependence of humans on the experience of recognition, even though its forms and contours can become differentiated in the course of historical transformations" (Honneth, "Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions," in *Inquiry*, 45, 2002, p. 515).

²² Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 166.

²³ Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect," p. 261.

²⁴ In my view, were Honneth to attempt to reforge those links, he would find that the critical claims of his theory of recognition would have to be weakened for those links to be strengthened.

²⁵ Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social."

²⁶ As Habermas and Horkheimer did before him, Honneth holds the chair in social philosophy at the University of Frankfurt. And as they were before him, Honneth is concerned with preserving social philosophy's identity and the universality of its statements. Thus, Honneth's concern about the state of social philosophy is hardly new. Already in 1931, Horkheimer described the state of social philosophy in a remarkably similar manner. Although Honneth does not refer to it (somewhat curiously), Horkheimer's essay, "Die Gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung," begins just like Honneth's, singling out precisely the lack of firm disciplinary contours not only between branches of philosophy, but between all of the human sciences. For the English translation, see *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1993, p. 1. Original in Max Horkheimer, *Sozial-philosophische Studien. Aufsätze, Reden, und Vorträge 1930-1972*, Herausgegeben von Werner Brede, Frankfurt, Fischer Verlag, 1972, p. 33.

- ²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Honneth's view of social philosophy see Nikolas Kompridis, "The Task of Social Philosophy: A Reply to Axel Honneth," eds. Cheryl Hughes and James Wong, *Social Philosophy Today* 17, Philosophy Documentation Center, 2002.
- ²⁸ In addition to the influence of object-relations theory, Honneth's approach also bears the influence of Ernst Tugendhat's paper, "Antike und moderne Ethik" in Tugendhat, *Probleme der Ethik*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1984, pp. 33-56. In this paper, which has had a considerable influence on contemporary German philosophy, Tugendhat argues in favour of a "formal concept of psychological health."
- ²⁹ Honneth is not the first, nor the last, theorist who wants to have his cake and eat it too. Yet, I still find quite perplexing his interest in grounding social criticism in a formal theory of the good. Ostensibly, the theoretical attraction to ideas of the good is their motivating power. But in what can the motivating power of a formal theory of the good consist once it is stripped of any significant content? From Plato to MacIntyre and Taylor, it has been thought that the good has to appear in some appropriate form if it is to move us to act in this way or that. Honneth presents us with a conception of the good that must hide its face, a good that must sneak in its substantive content through the back door. Is all this subterfuge really necessary?
- ³⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 62-75. See also pp. 495-522.
- ³¹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* 60, 1977, pp. 453-472, and *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1988. And see Charles Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 34-60, and *Sources of the Self*, pp. 3-110. Also, Nikolas Kompridis, "So We Need Something Else for Reason to Mean," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 271-295.
- ³² Honneth, "Grounding Recognition," p. 510.
- ³³ Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social," pp. 387-388.
- ³⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts. Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1968.
- ³⁵ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 5; also see, pp. 1-23. I have developed the normative implications of this idea in *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2004.
- ³⁶ Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social," p. 393.
- ³⁷ For example: Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty*, Charles Taylor's critique of naturalist epistemology and ontology, and Habermas' critique of the

philosophy of consciousness are at once an internal critique of philosophy and a critique of society and culture.

³⁸ Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, p. 43.

³⁹ *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, volume 8, in G. Hegel, *Werke*, eds. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michelet, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 84.

⁴⁰ For this story see Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1986; see also, Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 117-166. According to Tugendhat, the key move away from Kant's view of autonomy was taken the moment Fichte jointly poses the following questions: "Who am I really?" and "Are the moral norms to which I'm evidently committed really *mine*?". As Tugendhat explains, "Kant does not yet mean by autonomy a self-determination of the person as a person or of the I as an I, but a self-determination of reason." Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, pp. 133-134. In Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the question of self-determination is treated initially as the question of the 'who' of everyday *Dasein*.

⁴¹ For a detailed and compelling elaboration of this view, see Robert Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8:2, 2000, pp. 155-172. Also illuminating is Pippin's "You Can't Get There from Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 52-85.

⁴² Here, I'm deliberately following in the tracks of Honneth's Hegel interpretation in *Suffering from Indeterminacy*, in order to bring out what has been missed or neglected.

⁴³ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (my emphasis).

⁴⁴ To reinforce this point it is worth citing the whole *Enzyklopädie* formulation of freedom, particularly since it follows upon a formulation of the autonomy of thought (that is, of reason), the last part of which I also include: "In der Logik werden die Gedanken so gefaßt, daß sie keinen anderen Inhalt haben als einen dem Denken selbst angehörigen und durch dasselbe hervorgebrachten. So sind die Gedanken *reine* Gedanken. So ist der Geist rein bei sich selbst und hiermit frei, denn die Freiheit ist eben dies, in seinem Anderen bei sich selbst zu sein, von sich abzuhängen, das Bestimmende seiner selbst zu sein. In allen Trieben fange ich von einem Anderen an, von einem solchen, das für mich eine Äußerliches ist. Hier sprechen wir dann von Abhängigkeit. Freiheit is nur da, wo kein Anderes für mich ist, das ich nicht selbst bin." Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, volume 8, p. 84.

- ⁴⁵ Honneth, "Grounding Recognition," p. 516.
- ⁴⁶ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 173.
- ⁴⁷ According to Honneth, in modern societies practices of recognition have differentiated themselves into three spheres, the sphere of love, law, and achievement, within each of which the respective practices of recognition are ordered by a corresponding and distinct normative principle.
- ⁴⁸ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ⁵⁰ "What motivates individuals or social groups to call the prevailing social order into question and to engage in practical resistance is the *moral* conviction that, with respect to their own situations and particularities, the recognition principles considered legitimate are incorrectly or inadequately applied. It follows from this . . . that a moral experience that can be meaningfully described as one of 'dis-respect' must be regarded as the motivational basis of *all* social conflicts' (Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 157, second emphasis my own).
- ⁵¹ See Chapter IV of Heidegger's *Being and Time*.
- ⁵² I begin to offer such an account in "Misrecognizing Recognition: On Recent Misapplications of Hegel's Theory of Recognition" (forthcoming).
- ⁵³ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 24 (my emphasis).
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52 (my emphasis).
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ⁵⁷ "On the one hand, there can be an opening up of new personality-interests involving mutual recognition, leading to an increase in socially confirmed individuality; on the other hand, more personas can be integrated into already-existing conditions of recognition, leading to an expansion of the circle of mutually recognizing subjects" (Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 78). Compare Habermas: "Social individualization means, for the individuals, that the self-determination and self-realization that are expected of them presuppose a non-conventional sort of ego-identity. Even this identity formation can, however, only be *conceived* as socially constituted; it must therefore be stabilized in relationships of reciprocal recognition that are at least *anticipated*." *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992, p. 184.
- ⁵⁸ Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 77.
- ⁵⁹ See Habermas' "The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies," in *The New Conservatism*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 50.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

- ⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, New York, Harper and Row, 1962, p. 63. German original: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1986.
- ⁶² Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 14.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- ⁶⁶ For a fully elaborated statement of this alternative, see, Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future*, (forthcoming). For related statements see "The Normativity of the New," ed. Nikolas Kompridis, *Philosophical Romanticism*, London & New York, Routledge, 2005, and "The Transformation of Reason, Normative Change, and Social Criticism," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. II, no. 2, 2005.

Stefan Auer

The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe¹

ABSTRACT

The self-limiting revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe offer an alternative paradigm of revolutionary change that is reminiscent more of the American struggle for independence in 1776 than the Jacobin tendencies that grew out of the French Revolution of 1789. In order to understand the contradictory impulses of the revolutions of 1989—the desire for a radical renewal and the concern for preservation—this article takes as its point of departure the political thought of Hannah Arendt and Edmund Burke.

KEYWORDS: Arendt, Burke, collapse of communism, Conservatism, Jacobinism, self-limiting revolution, 1989

This article seeks to unravel the paradoxes of the revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe² by taking seriously the ideas and ideals that guided the dissident intellectuals in their struggle for liberty and the rule of law. They were driven by the desire not to repeat the mistakes of the revolutionary regime that they fought against—communism—and imposed limits on both their methods and goals. The result was a self-limiting revolution that resembled more the American struggle for independence in 1776 than the French Revolution of 1789. Hence, 1989 offers a radically different

paradigm of revolutionary change that is reminiscent of certain aspects of thinking of Hannah Arendt and Edmund Burke. Both authors dealt, from their vastly different vantage points, with the challenges of modernity. Arendt's work that highlighted the virtues of the American Revolution in contrast to the shortcomings of its French counterpart is particularly relevant to a better understanding of 1989.³ Similarly, Burke's thoughts on the French Revolution are remarkably prescient to the problems that the leaders of the revolutions in Central Europe had to face two centuries later: what is an adequate response to the challenge of radical revolutionary ideologies (from Jacobinism in the eighteenth century to Marxism-Leninism in the twentieth century)?

A reappraisal of 1989 should help us in addressing one of the fundamental questions of modern political life: How to build lasting political structures on the basis of a revolution? One possible answer is simply to avoid having a revolution. Or, if you absolutely must have a revolution (because, for example, there is no other way of ending a tyrannical regime) it is best to pretend that what is happening is not really a revolution. As a revolutionary leader, do so as if you were neither a revolutionary, nor a leader (as Václav Havel did in December 1989). The end-result may be strange and self-contradictory—a 'conservative revolution'—but it is one that creates possibilities for the establishment of lasting political institutions that preserve liberty under the rule of law. This is one of the reasons why Edmund Burke would have been likely to endorse the self-limiting revolutions of 1989, even though he vehemently opposed their famous predecessor, the French Revolution of 1789. In 1989, in contrast to 1789, a new beginning was presented as a 'return to normality', and a radical social and political change was implemented by strikingly moderate methods.

Hence, I will argue that the events of 1989 are best understood as self-limiting conservative revolutions in the Burkean sense. This concept is clearly based on an oxymoron: one cannot be both a conservative and a revolutionary. One cannot aim at a radical political change while, at the same time, be willing to accept the constraints of traditions and (to some extent at least) the existing political realities of the day. Yet, the aim of this article is not to resolve these inconsistencies, but rather to identify the conflicting imperatives, which endowed the events of 1989 in Central Europe with their unique

character. Similarly, no sensible political actor can hope to eliminate all contradictions from political life. In fact, the relative success of reluctant revolutionaries may have been partly due to their realisations of their own limits.⁴ This realisation was reflected in the employed strategies: the concept of self-limiting revolutions; the ideal of 'anti-politics' and of an ethical civil society; and the idea of combining the pursuit of ambitious future oriented goals with a reverence to (some aspects of) the past.

A precautionary note is in order here: clearly, a number of substantive conservative ideals cherished by Burke towards the end of the eighteenth century have lost their relevance today. It is the spirit of Burke's thinking (or the *Great Melody* in Conor Cruise O'Brien terminology)⁵ rather than just his particular statements and positions that I believe are useful for an analysis of the 1989 revolutions. As Martin Krygier has suggested, one should differentiate between "methodological conservatism [that] is compatible with a variety of substantive political commitments" and "normative conservatism" that is based on "a positive evaluation and attachment to what exists."⁶ This distinction makes it possible to characterise the leading dissidents in Central Europe as reluctant, or even 'conservative revolutionaries'. Even though people like Václav Havel, György Konrád and Adam Michnik⁷ differed a great deal amongst themselves, and in relation to Burke, with respect to their substantive political commitments, they shared "a distinctive view of the *methods* appropriate to politics."⁸ In line with this, I would see the militant counter-revolutionary pose that Burke adopted towards the end of his life as a betrayal of one of his guiding principles: the idea that dogmatic ideological thinking had to be rejected in any form. At any rate, the term conservative employed in this article is not to be confused with a dogmatic position based on a set of doctrines that amount to conservative ideology. The rejection of Jacobinism must go hand in hand with the rejection of ideologies. Hence, the dilemma that Burke and his followers had to confront was how to fight against Jacobinism without resorting to the very same Jacobin tendencies they opposed.⁹

Thus, it would be a very simplistic, though not an entirely implausible reading of Burke, to construe the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe as 'counter-revolutions'. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was seen as "the

manifesto of a counter-revolution” as early as 1791.¹⁰ It can be argued that Burke’s criticism of the destructive tendencies in the French Revolution was even more applicable to Marxism and the series of communist revolutions, which started with the October Revolution in 1917.¹¹ Hence, the defeat of communism in 1989 could be simply seen as amounting to the unmaking of 1917. In line with this, the controversial German historian, Ernst Nolte, interpreted the 1989 revolutions as attempts to negate the destruction of 1917 (which brought about the total destruction of bourgeoisie) by the ‘restoration’ of liberal democracy. Not surprisingly, Nolte also reads these events as the final confirmation of his ‘grand theory’ of twentieth century history. 1989 marks the end of the ‘*Weltbürgerkrieg*’, that is the world civil war—the term Nolte coined for the description of the cold war. World civil war was, according to Nolte, the logical continuation of the European civil war 1917-1945, which was characterised by the violent struggle of two competing ideologies and political regimes, that of Nazism and Communism.¹²

The problem with this kind of militant anti-communism is that it displays Jacobin tendencies that may be characteristic of many contemporary political movements on the Right, but are far removed from the thinking of those Central European dissidents who prevailed in 1989 (their anti-communism was anything but militant!). In fact, it is worth remembering that the Nazis were militant anti-communists, who also saw the French Revolution as anticipating the Bolshevik revolutions. Theirs was a ‘conservative revolution’ openly directed against the universal liberal values of the French Revolution. Militant anti-communism can be thus brought close to Goebbels who commented after the Nazi takeover in 1933: “With a stroke we have now obliterated 1789 from the history books.”¹³ Clearly, the reluctant revolutionaries of 1989 were conservative in radically different ways, not least because they actually endorsed the enlightened values (partly) inherited from the French Revolution, while they remained committed to the rejection of violence in political struggle.

Strange Revolutions/Strange Revolutionaries¹⁴

The revolutions of 1989 do not fit easily into any preconceived notion of revolutionary change in Europe. These were self-limiting revolutions in which there was very little, or no violence; no radical break with the past; and very

little or no revenge towards those who were responsible for the injustices of the old regime. In direct opposition to the revolutionary regime change orchestrated by the communists after the Second World War, the revolutions of 1989 were marked by constraint, not radicalism. They were, as Gale Stokes astutely observed, “revolutionary in the negative sense that they interred any realistic hope that the teleological experiment in the use of human reason to transform society in its entirety might succeed.”¹⁵ In this way, they undermined the credibility of the revolutionary tradition usually traced back to the French Revolution, which was driven by the belief that radically new ideas would give rise to radically improved societies.

By any standards, the dissident intellectuals in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, who were catapulted into the position of leaders of these revolutions, were very unlikely revolutionaries. The likes of Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, Adam Michnik in Poland and György Konrád in Hungary saw their struggle against the omnipotent communist state as an ‘anti-political’ struggle for authenticity, not a fight for political power. In line with this, they were reluctant to ally themselves with clearly defined ideological positions. Instead they appealed to a set of basic human values, assuming that a regime built on hypocrisy, greed and conformism could be defeated by truthfulness and a sense of basic human decency (hence Havel’s notion of the “living in truth”).¹⁶

1989 and Theories of Modernisation

These ideas may have been noble, but to many western observers they seemed antiquated and unsuitable as a basis for a coherent and clearly formulated political program. In line with this, dissident intellectuals and their ideas were not at the centre of scholarly attention before and (not even) after the collapse of communism.¹⁷ The disregard of western scholars towards intellectual developments amongst dissident intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe was even easier to justify after the collapse of communism. There was not much to study, so the argument went, given the fact that the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe did not bring about any new ideas. Jürgen Habermas, for example, identified as early as in 1990 “a peculiar characteristic of this revolution, namely its total lack of ideas that are either innovative or oriented towards the future.”¹⁸ According to Claus Offe, this

was also the reason why the prospects for the success of the postcommunist transition were rather slim. In a situation in which “the negative coalitions of dissidents and citizens’ movements had no coherent political and economic project on their own,”¹⁹ there was little hope for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to master the multiple challenges of economic and political transformation. It was Offe who coined the memorable phrase of the “tunnel at the end of the light,” which best captured the pessimistic predictions of many political theorists at the time.²⁰

We know now that most of those gloomy predictions did not materialise. The countries of Central Europe did not relapse to old, or new forms of despotism. It is worth remembering, however, that immediately after 1989 it would have been prudent *to expect* that the revolutions would turn nasty, and that people would end up supporting some kind of authoritarian regimes. The challenges ahead were indeed formidable, and it was by no means inevitable, for example, that the eruption of violence fuelled by extreme nationalism was limited to the Balkans. Yet, no similar developments took place in the countries of Central Europe. This is not to suggest that this process is irreversible, or that there are no challenges ahead—far from it. But I think that it is fair to say that despite many difficulties and significant current challenges, all the countries of Central Europe have developed remarkably stable political regimes, in which “liberal democracy is the only game in town.”²¹

Historically speaking the failure of the revolutions would not have been unusual—it is their success that is remarkable and calls for explanation. As Hannah Arendt noted “it is perfectly true and a sad fact indeed, that most so-called revolutions, far from achieving *constitutio libertatis*, have not even been able to produce constitutional guarantees of civil rights and liberties, the blessings of ‘limited government.’”²² Contrary to Offe’s assumptions, I will argue (relying on Arendt and Burke) that the key to understanding the success of the 1989 Revolutions in Central Europe *was their lack of radically new ideas*. It was precisely *because* these revolutions were unoriginal and backward-looking that they were also largely successful.²³

But before discussing 1989 as self-limiting conservative revolutions, it is useful to recall some crucial arguments of the theories of modernisation. Possibly the most plausible explanation for the revolutions of 1989 was to see them

as 'catching up revolutions', revolutions which simply allowed the societies behind the former iron curtain to catch up with the rest of Europe in its never-ending march towards modernity.

This interpretation had the great advantage of assimilating the experience of 1989 into the existing narratives of European history based on theories of modernisation. Although most observers rejected Fukuyama's claim about the end of history as far too simplistic, they were less disinclined to see 1989 as the culmination of those historic processes that were triggered originally in 1789. While the French Revolution marks the birth of modernity, 1989 brings Europe to maturity. In this account, the path of European civilisation towards ever-greater progress was merely interrupted by the tragic accidents of Nazism and communism. Typical is the assessment by Francois Furet, who believed that the revolutions of 1989 imbued

the famous principles of 1789 with a certain freshness and with renewed universality. As we begin to close the long and tragic digression that was the Communist illusion, we find ourselves more than ever confronted by the great dilemmas of democracy as they appeared at the end of the 18th century, expressed by ideas and by the course of the French Revolution.²⁴

Furet's view is not without justification and it resonates with the views of some of the actors of the revolutions in 1989. György Konrád, for example, noted that their timing was "an edifying coincidence, one might say: an homage, at a remove of two hundred years, to the revolution that first proclaimed the civil rights of the individual."²⁵ In fact, the most popular slogan of these revolutions, "the return to Europe," could be seen as the invocation of those principles that are usually associated with the heritage of the French Revolution: the ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity.²⁶

Yet, the reliance on the theories of modernisation and the French Revolution as the exclusive paradigm of radical political change obscures some unique features of the revolutions of 1989. These theories focus on abstract historic forces and are hence ill equipped to deal with the impact of those imponderable factors that make societal change such a fascinating (and unpredictable) subject of inquiry: the role of personalities and their ideas; the role of cultural and political identities and the like. More generally, the theories of modernisation have little to add to our understanding of possibilities to

challenge repressive political structures from within. It is telling that while most of those observers who were indebted to the modernisation theories failed to predict the collapse of communism, in hindsight the theory gives the most plausible explanation for the reasons of the 'inevitability' of this collapse.²⁷

Moreover, 1989 invalidated (or at least thoroughly discredited) one of the defining principles of 1789; the principle extolled by revolutionary leaders and thinkers from Robespierre through Lenin to Žižek, that a radical societal change is only possible as a result of a violent struggle.²⁸ The reluctant revolutionaries in Central Europe refused to accept that revolutionary violence should be used (and justified) as a liberating force. They rejected "the Jacobin orientations and program" based on "the belief in the possibility of transforming society through totalistic political action." In this way, the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe could be seen as undermining the credibility of that component of contemporary political discourse which S.N. Eisenstadt calls the "Jacobin dimension of modernity."²⁹

One of the obvious possible conclusions to draw from the limitations of modernisation theories in relation to the collapse of communism is to construe the 1989 revolutions as 'post-modern'. "Modernity's failure," in this view, ushered into "post-modernity's predicament."³⁰ "Postcommunism is post-modern," avers Richard Sakwa, "in the paradoxical sense that it returns to premodern traditions truncated by the triumph of modernity from the late eighteenth century."³¹

The anti-communist revolutions of 1989-91 transcended the logic of modern vanguardist revolutions by espousing specific rather than universal goals, by transcending sectarian agendas with national ones, and by rejecting rather than innovating. . . . [T]hese were 'anti-revolutions,' repudiating the dynamic of revolution and counter-revolution in their entirety. In short, post-communism is post-revolutionism.³²

In a similar vein, Boris Kapustin critiques the reductionism of modernisation theories for their tendency to assume that there is "an uncompromising opposition between 'tradition,' or better, 'traditionalism,' and 'modernity.'"³³ However, the attempts to replace modernisation theories with suitably adjusted theories of postmodernity are themselves not without limitations. Ironically,

these theories still rely (if only implicitly) on the crude temporal logic that divides history into pre-modern, modern and post-modern times. As Johann P. Arnason reminds us, “visions of an existing or emerging postmodernity are always based on oversimplified images of modernity.”³⁴ Hence the terms borrowed from post-modern discourse tend to obscure rather than clarify the political developments in the countries of the former Eastern bloc.³⁵ At any rate, the talk about ‘post-communism-as-postmodernity’, or ‘post-communism as post-revolutionism’, adds little to our understanding of its problems (let alone helping the actors to deal with them).

1989 as Self-limiting Conservative Revolutions

Rejecting various ‘postist’ labels and their pretensions,³⁶ I want to suggest a simpler conceptual framework that should allow us to evaluate the meaning and significance of the 1989 revolutions without falling into the pitfalls of modernisation theories. Ironically, the term that would possibly better describe the events of 1989 is revolution in its original meaning as a return to an earlier state of affairs. This is the kind of revolutionary change defended by the critics of the French Revolution, such as Edmund Burke. Burke’s famous rebuttal of the ideologically inspired violent excesses of the French Revolution strongly resonates with the key insights of dissident intellectuals in Central Europe: the concept of a self-limiting revolution, the idea of a ‘return to normality’ and the ideals of an ethical civil society and ‘anti-politics’.

One does not need to adopt a postmodern idiom to argue (as Kapustin did) that it is unhelpful to postulate an unbridgeable gap between the political program of modernity and tradition. As David Gress demonstrated in a recent historic survey, the emergence of modernity and the concomitant rise of the West should not be seen as marking a radical break in human history (which can be conveniently dated with the French Revolution), but rather a result of long-lasting historic developments that should be traced back to its Greek, Latin and Christian origins. Gress challenges the myth of a sudden appearance of freedom in the western world and guards against the influence of the philosophical program of radical enlightenment (Rousseau). According to Gress, the political, social and economic phenomenon of modern liberty was made possible by the synthesis of the heritage of the Old West with the political values that came to be equated with the New West.³⁷ This is clearly

in line with the kind of thinking represented by Edmund Burke (and later Alexis de Tocqueville), but also of the dissident intellectuals in Central Europe.

Ever since Burke's publication of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,³⁸ the proponents of such revolutionary changes that aimed at delivering (instantly) both liberty and equality had to deal with one of the fundamental dilemmas of liberal democracy: the fact that democracy can destroy liberty. Thinkers as different as Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Lord Acton, Hannah Arendt, and more recently Fareed Zakaria,³⁹ from their different vantage points, warned against the danger of substituting the rule of mob for the rule of law: this was the problem of 'the tyranny of the majority'.

As Burke argued in his response to the French Revolution, unregulated liberty can lead to anarchy, in which everyone would lose out:

When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. [. . .] I should therefore suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and the obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidity of property; with peace and order: with civil and social manners. [. . .]

The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints.⁴⁰

Burke's reluctance to congratulate the French people on the attainment of liberty was vindicated once the revolution descended into a more violent phase. The guillotine and the reign of terror under Robespierre, in Burke's view, were not just an aberration marking the betrayal of the initial ideals of the revolution, but a direct consequence of attempts at the implementation of those very same radical ideas. This is not to say that the descent to anarchy and the concomitant increase in political violence were inevitable, but rather that certain radical ideals can pave ground for these developments. This lesson was well understood by the dissident leaders in Central Europe who

were vehemently opposed to the use of violence. Consider Michnik's comments about the virtues of democracy:

Democracy is not identical to freedom. Democracy is freedom written into the rule of law. Freedom in itself, without the limits imposed on it by law and tradition, is a road to anarchy and chaos—where the right of the strongest rules.⁴¹

Michnik's view echoes Burke, and is representative of the conscious effort of the reluctant revolutionaries to lay the ground for liberty under the rule of law.

An Alternative Paradigm of Revolutionary Change: 1688 and 1776 not 1789

In fact, even Burke himself can be seen as a defender of the ideals of liberty (if not equality), and a certain kind of revolutionary change, which he saw best embodied in the Glorious Revolution in Britain of 1688. As the full title of Burke's seminal work indicates, there was another dimension to his critic of the French Revolution often neglected in the discussions about modern revolutions, which was his concern with the protection of the legacies of revolution in Britain.⁴² Hence, Burke's key insights can also help in understanding the unique nature of 1989 by providing alternative points of reference, such as the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the American Revolution of 1776. Burke's account of the revolution of 1688 that focuses on the attempt to preserve "*antient* indisputable laws and liberties,"⁴³ can be related to the notion of a "return to normality" in the countries of Central Europe. When Czechs, Poles, Slovaks and Hungarians shed their oppressive regimes, they believed (rightly or wrongly) that they were simply reclaiming *their* ancient liberties.

Hence, it was crucially important for the success of the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe that the universal liberal ideals were 'translated' into domestic nationalist discourses at the theoretical level,⁴⁴ and into national constitutions and the emerging legal orders at the practical level. In this context, it is telling that the first president of the Hungarian constitutional court, László Sólyom, was able to justify a number of controversial decisions by referring to the existing "invisible constitution," as well as "the history of constitutional

democracies,” or “a common constitutional law of Europe.”⁴⁵ Václav Havel was also well aware of the challenge of embedding liberal principles within the national context. As he argued in an interview with Adam Michnik for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, universal liberal principles could not be a sufficient reason for the foundation of an independent state.

[Why] could we not become the seventeenth state of the Federal Republic of Germany, why have an independent state because of something which is a universal programme? I think it is necessary to seek other dimensions of Czech political traditions and Czech statehood. Something, to my mind, that has occurred repeatedly in Czech political life from time immemorial is a sense of a broader responsibility. [. . .] This sense of responsibility and the feeling that the Czech concern is a human concern (*věc česká je věc lidská*) can be found in St Wenceslas, Charles IV, George of Poděbrady, Comenius, Masaryk, Patočka. I think that this political line should become a part of the foundations of the new Czech state and even a warrant of its prospects.⁴⁶

This combination of universalist and particularist agendas makes 1989 look more like the American struggle for independence—at least when one accepts Burke’s interpretation of these events. In his view, the American colonists did not fight in the name of some abstract principles such as the Rights of Men, but merely sought to “reclaim” their “Rights of Englishmen.” “The feelings of the Colonies were formerly the feelings of Great Britain,” argued Burke.⁴⁷ Freedom was the most precious inheritance that the Americans gained from Britain:

We cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people, and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation, in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates. The language in which they would hear you tell them this tale, would detect the imposition; your speech would betray you. An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery.⁴⁸

To do justice to Burke, it is important to acknowledge other differences between the French and the American Revolutions, which make the latter look more like the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe. Whatever is suggested in Thomas Jefferson’s ambitious rhetoric in the *Declaration of Independence*, the goals of the American Revolution were always more moderate than the goals of the

French Revolution. They were tempered by the concern of its leaders to avoid a descent into anarchy; to ensure stability and order in the new republic. As Irving Kristol observed (relying largely on Arendt's interpretation), "all revolutions unleash tides of passion, and the American Revolution was no exception. But it *was* exceptional in the degree to which it was able to subordinate these passions to serious and nuanced thinking about fundamental problems of political philosophy."⁴⁹ This is the reason why Burke was able to endorse the American Revolution and oppose the French one later without being inconsistent.⁵⁰

For similar reasons, both a Burkean and an Arendtian position towards the American Revolution would allow for the endorsement of the revolutions in 1989. Michnik lends support to this interpretation in the Polish context, "Solidarity has never had a vision of an ideal society. It wants to live and let live. Its ideals are closer to the American Revolution than to the French."⁵¹ Yet, not many observers have paid attention to the similarities between the American Revolution of 1776 and the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe.⁵² This may simply be one of the consequences of the long lasting infatuation of Western intellectuals with the French Revolution at the expense of its American predecessor. As Arendt noted,

It was the French and not the American Revolution that set the world on fire, and it was consequently from the course of the French Revolution, and not from the course of events in America or from the acts of the Founding Fathers, that our present use of the word 'revolution' received its connotations and overtones everywhere . . . The sad truth of the matter is that the French Revolution, which ended in disaster, has made world history, while the American Revolution, so triumphantly successful, has remained an event of little more than local importance.⁵³

However, if we accept the 'Burkean' view of the 1989 revolutions as marking the end of the modern revolutionary tradition in Europe (derived from 1789), then the order of importance of the two revolutions, which Arendt bemoans, could be turned around. This is not to deny the limitations of the American paradigm of revolutionary change. Arendt was well aware of the difficulties in sustaining the noble values of the revolution, such as "public freedom, public happiness, public spirit,"⁵⁴ within everyday political practice

once the revolution had been completed. The greatest challenge was how to keep alive the revolutionary spirit without suffering the consequences of revolutionary instability. Yet, according to Arendt, the American Revolution was more successful than its French counterpart in opening up new opportunities for citizens to become actively involved in politics as equals under the rule of law, because it managed to keep the balance between two conflicting elements: “the concern with stability and the spirit of the new.”⁵⁵ By focusing on political liberty rather than the issues of social equality, the American Revolution created public space for authentic political engagement. As Winfried Thaa forcefully demonstrated, the revolutions of 1989 can be seen as late vindications of Arendt’s attempt to challenge the dominant concept of revolution in Europe with a “concept of revolution that does not seek the radical overthrow of the societal order, but rather, orientated on the American model, aims primarily at a renewal of the political space.”⁵⁶

Another aspect of the French Revolution, which was not echoed in 1989, was its adverse relation to religion. In fact, the hostility of the French enlightenment to religion, which Burke abhorred, can be contrasted with the importance of religious sentiments that fed into the revolutions of 1989. This also brings it closer to the American model that was “based on a political ideology transformed from a religious experience but maintaining its religious orientations.”⁵⁷

Spiritual Grounding of Liberal Democracy

The most obvious example to illustrate this is, of course, Poland, where the role of the Catholic Church was not just contingent on the fact that it was the only institution that was relatively independent of the state (though this was undoubtedly an important factor too). There were also some profound philosophical reasons why the fight for liberty was seen in alliance with the fight for authentic religious faith. As the prominent Polish historian of Solidarity, Jan Józef Lipski clearly demonstrated, the movement was strongly influenced by a Christian ethos, which even a large majority of the non-religious members adopted as their own. This attitude was described by Jacek Kuroń in an essay with a revealing title: “A Christian Without God.”⁵⁸

In Slovakia too, the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989 was anticipated by large religious demonstrations in the summer of 1988, which had both openly politi-

cal as well as spiritual dimensions. Even in the Czech Republic, which is characterised by a thoroughly secular society, the defence of human rights was voiced in almost religious language. Consider Patočka's statement about the importance of human rights, which was published in a key document of Charter 77:

No society, no matter how well-equipped it may be technologically, can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage. . . . The idea of human rights is nothing other than the conviction that even states, even society as a whole, are subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment: that they recognise something unconditional that is higher than they are, something that is binding even on them, sacred, inviolable . . .⁵⁹

So, even Patočka, while remaining truthful to phenomenology and its anti-foundationalist philosophical position, sought to ground the idea of human rights in "something unconditional." Following in his steps, Havel repeatedly stressed the importance of morality in politics; he talked about higher responsibility that he sought to justify with a reference to some higher entity: whether it be God, "the chain of being," "the voice of being,"⁶⁰ or any other metaphysical concept.⁶¹ While these philosophical positions may not warrant Derrida's reading of Patočka as "a fundamentally Christian thinker,"⁶² let alone Žižek's attack on Havel for his alleged "religious fundamentalism,"⁶³ it is clear that both Patočka and Havel were *not* dogmatically opposed to Christianity and recognised it as an important (though not the only) resource for moral deliberations. Havel also repeatedly raised concerns about the destructive potential of the more ambitious and radical aspects of enlightenment, which gave rise to ideological frameworks, or in Burke's terminology "abstract designs."⁶⁴

At any rate, both revolutions, the one in 1776 as well as the one in 1989, can be described as self-limiting revolutions. The idea of a self-limiting revolution emerged partly as a pragmatic response to a new geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe. After a series of unsuccessful revolts against the Soviet style authoritarian communist regimes (in 1953 in Germany, 1956 in Hungary and Poland, and 1968 in Czechoslovakia), it became clear that no significant changes of the political system within the countries of Central

Europe were possible as long as the Soviet Union was determined to maintain its control over its satellite states. Yet, the actions of the reluctant revolutionaries in Central Europe were guided not only by these pragmatic considerations. Equally, or even more important, was their conviction that they had to exercise constraint in their own political struggle in order to prevent “the very negative experiences of all unlimited social revolutions of the Jacobin-Bolshevik type.”⁶⁵ They were also convinced that the ‘post-totalitarian’ communist regimes could have been challenged from within by peaceful means, if only enough people were determined to defy it. This was the reasoning behind Havel’s seminal essay “The Power of the Powerless,” in which he rejected the use of violence inspired by dogmatic ideologies:

‘dissidents’ tend to be sceptical about political thought based on the faith that profound social changes can only be achieved by bringing about (regardless of the method) changes in the system or in the government, and the belief that such changes—because they are considered ‘fundamental’—justify the sacrifice of ‘less fundamental’ things, in other words human lives. Respect for a theoretical concept here outweighs respect for human life. Yet this is precisely what threatens to enslave humanity all over again.⁶⁶

Michnik was even more direct in rejecting the ideal of revolutionary violence associated with the French Revolution: “to believe in overthrowing the dictatorship of the party by revolution is both unrealistic and dangerous,” he argued, because “those who use force to storm present-day Bastilles are likely to build bigger and worse Bastilles.”⁶⁷

Consequently, the opposition leaders were willing to constrain themselves in their exercise of power even after the actual collapse of communism. They made considerable efforts to maintain “the fiction of legal continuity with a past without legality.”⁶⁸ As Arato commented, this is one of the remarkable legacies of 1989. “It is the great contribution of the Central and East European struggle for legality in the midst of radical transformation that, even without inherited republican institutions, the new can be built without total rupture with the past.”⁶⁹ The anti-communist revolutionaries were prepared to make deals with their former communist foes, because they feared that the alternative would have brought about a descent to chaos and anarchy. These actors “were trying at all times to promote a revolution without a revolution.”⁷⁰

Another distinguishing feature of the self-limiting 1989 revolutions in Central Europe was their negotiated character. The negotiations allowed for a political transition that was radical in its speed but very moderate in its means. One of the crucial factors in this was the restraint shown by the leaders of the democratic opposition. Adam Michnik defended his conciliatory stance towards the communists in the round table discussions in summer 1989 as follows: "The path of negotiations brings many disappointments, bitterness, and a sense of injustice and unfulfillment. But it does not bring victims. Disappointed are those who are, after all, alive."⁷¹

Moreover, the opposition leaders did not see themselves as the only possible representatives of "a monolithic people in revolt against its masters" but, rather, sought to represent "the multiplicity and diversity of all citizens."⁷² This point could be nicely illustrated with the analysis of the strategies used by the Czechoslovak dissident movement Charter 77. As its founding members such as Václav Havel and Jan Patočka repeatedly stressed, the main purpose of the movement was to engage the communist rulers in an open-ended dialogue with all sectors of society. This ideal informed also the working methods of the leading citizen movement in the revolution of 1989, the so-called Civic Forum. The Czech historian Jiří Suk may have gone too far by suggesting that one could usefully relate this instigation to dialogue to the Habermasian concept of a "communicative ethics,"⁷³ but there can be little doubt that they constituted an attempt to reclaim the public sphere as a space for genuine political engagement. In this sense, one can also talk about "a return to normality,"⁷⁴ in which the lives of citizens were no longer to be determined by the bureaucratic monopoly of the communist party, but rather by an open-ended contest between different societal actors.

'Return to Normality'

The notion of a 'return to normality' may have been very ambiguous,⁷⁵ but it found resonance with a vast majority of the people. Many Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians simply desired to restore a sense of normality after the 'foolish experiment' of communism. The fact that this 'normality' was equated with securing life-styles that were thought characteristic of the well-established democracies in the West, and was hence quite removed from any present or past experiences of the peoples in Central Europe, did not prevent

them from seeing it as their natural destiny. It was their return to a past that (may have) never existed (or a past they could have had but for communism). As the Polish sociologist Jerzy Jedlicki wryly remarked, Poland has always been returning to Europe, although it has actually never been there.⁷⁶ Yet, it is precisely thanks to this perception, that it was possible for the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians to see their fight for liberty as being in line with the best aspects of their own national traditions.⁷⁷ In this way, the notion of a return to normality linked the project of postcommunist transition, which was oriented towards a liberal-democratic future, with the pre-communist past.

However, not only the pre-communist past served as a point of reference for the evaluation of liberal values. The new leaders also sought to rally people in support of liberal values by recalling their failed revolts against communism. This return to the best aspects of dissident past(s) was obviously in conflict with the second aspect of self-limiting conservative revolutions, the effort to maintain the fiction of legal continuity with the illegal and illegitimate communist regime. Clearly, these were contradictory impulses: one could *not* 'preserve' pasts, which were so radically different and even mutually exclusive. Yet, it was done even when it led to grotesque occurrences. It suffices to recall that Václav Havel, who as a leader of Charter 77 was thoroughly despised by the communists, was voted into the presidency of Czechoslovakia in December 1989 by the national assembly clearly dominated by the communists.

In fact, there is a further irony that makes the 1989 revolutions conservative in the Burkean sense. Even though the 1989 revolutions shared a number of goals with 1789, which Burke opposed in his own times, many of the radical ideas from more than 200 hundred years ago seem less radical today. For example, Burke was not unusual in his own time in opposing democratic ideals and the modern concept of citizenship;⁷⁸ these enlightened concepts were generally seen as too radical, and dangerous for liberty. However, two hundred years after the French Revolution the ideals of the French revolutionaries themselves became a part of a European, or Western tradition,⁷⁹ and most people today would not think of democracy and liberty as inherently incompatible.

Similarly, the ideal of universal human rights, which was vehemently opposed by Burke as far too radical and dangerous, has become a powerful source of

inspiration for people with vastly different backgrounds; the discourse of human rights today cuts across all ideological boundaries. It is worth remembering, however, that this is a result of a relatively recent development (from Helsinki 1975 to Charter 1977 to the notion of 'human rights wars' in Kosovo and Iraq), in which Central and East European intellectuals played a crucial role. Even Arendt subscribed to Burke's views on human rights as late as in the 1960s. As she put it, "the perplexities of the Rights of Man are manifold, and Burke's famous argument against them is neither obsolete nor 'reactionary.'"⁸⁰ Like Burke, Arendt believed that the ideal of universal human rights is far too ambitious to be useful in practical politics.⁸¹ Like Burke, she was convinced that people only acquire rights through belonging to a particular political community, one which is capable and willing of enforcing them: "We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights."⁸²

Anti-Politics and Civil Society

Due to the recent popularity of the concept of civil society, which transcends ideological boundaries, it may be easily forgotten that the concept was originally based on a rather conservative ideal—the conviction that free societies rely on private virtues. Good character and virtue, according to Burke, cannot be developed as a result of an abstract ideal of humanity. They can only be fostered within a relatively small community of citizens here and now; within the 'little platoons', in which everyone knows their place (moving in expanding concentric circles from your family to your neighbourhood, from your neighbourhood to your city, from your city to your nation and the wider world). One does not become virtuous simply by understanding and accepting the wisdom of Rousseau's 'General Will', or the Kantian 'categorical imperative'. Similarly, for Hannah Arendt, there is not much use in invoking the noble principles of liberty, unless the kind of political space is (re-)created in society, in which authentic actions of independent citizens can take place. Burke's own personal example showed that this is not to say that one should limit one's moral concerns to one's own small community. But the starting point must be your concern with the individuals here and now. As Burke put it:

I have no great opinion of that sublime abstract, metaphysic reverisionary, contingent humanity, which in *cold blood* can subject the *present time* and

those whom we *daily see and converse with* to immediate calamities in favour of the *future and uncertain* benefit of persons who *only exist in idea*.⁸³

Once again, this kind of reasoning resonates with the convictions of dissident intellectuals (for example, Havel, Michnik, Konrád), who strongly believed that only through changing the ‘hearts and minds’ of individual members of society could communism be defeated, and later the process of postcommunist transition succeed. This is why Havel repeatedly stressed that one must turn away from “abstract political visions of the future and toward concrete human beings and ways of defending them effectively in the here and now.”⁸⁴ Hence, any genuine political engagement had to be a result of taking concrete responsibility. This was the ideal of an ethical civil society.

In its initial form, the concept of civil society was not meant to be revolutionary; civil society was not seen as directed against the state, but was supposed to complement it. That was the vision inherited “from Locke, the Scottish Enlightenment, Burke, Hegel, and de Tocqueville.”⁸⁵ As one of the leading Hungarian intellectuals, G.M. Tamás, explained, the dissidents in Central Europe appropriated this concept creatively for their own purposes and turned it against the oppressive communist state. This antagonism between state and society is reminiscent more of Thomas Paine than Burke, and it is not surprising, hence, that the Central European concept of civil society had strong appeal to the left-wing intellectuals in the West.⁸⁶ It was Paine who asserted in *Common Sense* that “society is in every state a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil.”⁸⁷

The dissident’s suspicion of the communist state and its official ideology, Marxism, found its expression in the idea of anti-politics. Anti-politics was directed not only against the state, but any institutionalised politics, and was hostile not only towards Marxism, but any (dogmatic) political ideology in general. However, it would be a crude misunderstanding to see the ideal of anti-politics as apolitical. On the contrary, by liberating individuals from the constraints of institutional politics and the schematic thinking imposed by abstract ideological frameworks, individuals were empowered to endow their actions with authentic meaning: in this sense personal became political. The ideal of anti-politics urged people to act “as if” they were free,⁸⁸ and to assume

responsibility that comes with freedom. Hence, anti-politics was *not* a politics without principles, rather simply a “politics without cliché.”⁸⁹

In fact, if there is one distinct contribution from the intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe to political theory in general, it is to be found in their conviction that “the old categories of ideological contestation have become hopelessly clichéd: they refer only to themselves in tendentious circles of self-referentiality.”⁹⁰ While many intellectuals in the West seem still indebted to these ideological frameworks (even when intent on overcoming them),⁹¹ most intellectuals in Central Europe abandoned them. However, even though this ‘post-ideological’ position rejects all great narratives it would be a mistake to label it as post-modern (especially if postmodernism implies moral relativism). As I have argued, it is much closer to the thinking of the likes of Burke, who identified the dangers of schematic ideological thinking well before it became one of the dominant features of modernity. Arendt shared this suspicion of ideologies, which have the tendency to neatly divide the political world into binary oppositions. This is reflected in her critique of conventional theories of revolution, which underpin the argument about the self-limiting conservative revolutions of 1989 advanced in this article. In her view, “the very fact that these two elements [which were contained in the spirit of revolution], the concern with stability and the spirit of the new, have become opposites in political thought and terminology—the one being identified as conservatism and the other being claimed as the monopoly of progressive liberalism—must be recognized to be among the symptoms of our loss.”⁹² Hence, following Arendt, the legacy of the revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe can be seen as an invitation to rethink the relationship between the ongoing concern with political stability and the desire for a radical renewal.

Concluding Remarks

The attempts of Central European dissidents to reclaim the sphere of politics as a place for human authenticity resulted in their rejection of ideologies. Leszek Kołakowski offered a witty justification of this approach in the late 1970s. He proposed the establishment of a Conservative-Liberal Socialist International, which was based on the assumption that the differences between the sensible parts of these ideologies were not insurmountable. Thus, their

conflicting demands were not mutually exclusive.⁹³ In line with this, the dissident intellectuals in Central Europe were able to follow radically conflicting ideals that led to the relative success of their self-limiting conservative revolutions in 1989.

The goals of these conservative revolutionaries were both modest and ambitious. They were modest, because they did not openly seek political power, ambitious because they aimed at a redefinition of political space and activities within it. It may be questioned as to how successful these revolutions were in delivering those more ambitious goals. As Arendt reminds us, to sustain the spirit of the revolution after the event is very difficult, if not impossible. However, the attempts of the reluctant revolutionaries to reclaim the sphere of politics as a place for human authenticity must be seen, like democracy, as a part of an open-ended project—a normative ideal worth striving for, rather than something that can be achieved overnight (or in those 15 years that passed since the collapse of communism). The revolutions were successful to the extent that they created preconditions for liberty under the rule of law. The relative success of the conservative revolutions in Central Europe could give some hope to those political theorists who, like S.N. Eisenstadt, believe that ‘the paradoxes of democracy’ do not need to (and should not) lead to its ultimate demise.

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Notes

- ¹ I wish to thank András Bozóki, Christopher Finlay, Tom Garvin, Andreas Hess, Robert Horvath, Martin Krygier, Tim Mehigan, Suzanne Mulcahy, Tony Philips, Charles Sowerwine, Tobias Theiler and Ben Tonra for their support and constructive criticism of earlier versions of this paper. I also benefited from the facilities of the Contemporary Europe Research Centre in Melbourne in producing this paper.
- ² Central Europe, for the purposes of this article, denotes the countries of the so-called Visegrad four: the Czech Republic, Slovakia (that is Czechoslovakia before 1993), Poland and Hungary.
- ³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York, The Viking Press, 1965.
- ⁴ This is in marked contrast to those contemporary neo-conservatives in the United

States who believe that there are virtually no limits to their ambitious project of radically remaking the existing world order. Their thinking displays more Jacobin rather than Burkean tendencies.

- ⁵ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- ⁶ Martin Krygier, "Conservative-Liberal-Socialism Revisited," *The Good Society*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2002, p. 8.
- ⁷ While I do not seek to establish a causal relationship between Burke and the 1989 revolutions (Burke provides me simply with an interpretative vantage point), it is worth noting that Michnik admired Burke's work. In a February 1988 interview for the *Times Literary Supplement* Michnik bemoaned the fact that Burke's *Reflections* were banned in Poland and suggested that if he "was proficient in English [he] would translate this book and present Gorbachev and others with a complimentary copy—to teach them the philosophy of compromise." Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, p. 111.
- ⁸ Krygier, "Conservative-Liberal-Socialism," p. 7.
- ⁹ As Darrin M. McMahon noted, towards the end of his life Burke increasingly adopted dogmatic views inspired by those French reactionaries, whose "modern politics of the Right was not conservative but revolutionary in its desire to remake the world in the image of a rigorous ideal." Darrin M. McMahon, "Edmund Burke and the Literary Cabal: A Tale of Two Enlightenments," in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 245. In contrast, earlier writings of Burke can be seen as anticipating the concerns of critical theory and postmodern philosophy. As Stephen K. White argued, "Burke's critique of modernity begins to exhibit some family resemblance to contemporary ones that have focused upon the costs of the modern imperatives of rationalization, especially the unlimited drive to mastery, both of the self and of the world around us." Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics*, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage, 1994, p. 84.
- ¹⁰ Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Introduction," in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p. 51.
- ¹¹ "Burke would have been likely to see in the principles of the Communist revolution the emergence in even purer form of all that he most detested in the contemporary revolution whose progress he watched with horror and fascination in France, and sought with eloquence and skill to check in England. The spirit of total, radical innovation; the overthrow of all prescriptive rights; the confiscation of property; destruction of the Church, the nobility, the family, tradition, veneration, the ancestors, the nation—this is the catalogue of all that Burke dreaded in

his darkest moments, and every item in it he would have discovered in Marxism." *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

- ¹² Ernst Nolte, "Die unvollständige Revolution: Die Rehabilitierung des Bürgertums und der defensive Nationalismus," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 24, 1991, p. 27. I have no space to explore the controversy that Nolte's interpretative framework caused in Germany and beyond. Suffice to say that his thesis triggered the so-called "Historikerstreit," in which Nolte was accused of being apologetic of Nazi crimes by playing down their historic significance. It is interesting to note, however, that some aspects of his theory are today accepted within the mainstream. It is no longer taboo, for example, to compare Nazism and Communism, and to contextualise the rise of Nazism within the broader context of European history. See for example, Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, London, Penguin, 1999. For a good summary of key Nolte's ideas and their evaluation see also François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1999, pp. 518-9.
- ¹³ Stefan Steinberg, "Right-Wing Historian Ernst Nolte Receives the Konrad Adenauer Prize for Science," *World Socialist Web Site*, 17 August 2000.
- ¹⁴ The following section relies heavily on my article, "Das Erbe von 1989: die Revolutionen für Europa," *Osteuropa*, 54: 5-6, 2004.
- ¹⁵ Gale Stokes, *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 163.
- ¹⁶ Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern*, ed. John Keane, Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 1985.
- ¹⁷ Winfried Thaa, *Die Wiedergeburt des Politischen: Zivilgesellschaft und Legitimitätskonflikt in den Revolutionen von 1989*, Opladen, Leske + Budrich, 1996, p. 34. See also Jeffrey C. Isaac, "The Strange Silence of Political Theory," *Political Theory*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1995.
- ¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left," *New Left Review*, 183, 1990, p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition: The East European and East German Experience*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1997, p. 43.
- ²⁰ Claus Offe, *Der Tunnel am Ende des Lichts: Erkundungen der politischen Transformation im Neuen Osten*, Frankfurt/Main, Campus Verlag, 1994.
- ²¹ Juan J. Linz and Alfred E. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 5.
- ²² Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 220, cf. 111. More recently, Andrew Arato has also argued

that “revolutions . . . are rarely conducive to democracy.” Andrew Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, and Legitimacy*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 80.

²³ This is not to say that other aspects were not important. The international environment, for example, “has been exceptionally favourable to the democratic transition in Central Europe.” Jacques Rupnik, “The Postcommunist Divide,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1999, p. 62.

²⁴ François Furet, “From 1789 to 1917 & 1989,” *Encounter*, 1990, p. 5.

²⁵ György Konrád, *The Melancholy of Rebirth: Essays from Post-Communist Central Europe, 1989-1994*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace, 1995, p. 22.

²⁶ Europe was for most people in Central Europe primarily a political concept synonymous with the West; that is with the traditions of liberal democracy. Already in November 1956, for example, when there was a popular uprising against the communist rule in Hungary, the director of the Hungarian News agency called for help against the Soviet invasion with the following words: “We are going to die for Hungary *and for Europe*” (my italics). Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” *New York Review of Books*, 1984, 33.

²⁷ For a persuasive critique of the theories of modernisation see Thaa, *Die Wiedergeburt des Politischen*; for a useful and comprehensive overview of the theories of collapse of communism see, for example, Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997. For arguments against historic determinism see, for example, Edgar Morin, “The Anti-Totalitarian Revolution,” in *Between Totalitarianism and Postmodernity*, eds. Gillian Robinson Peter Beilharz, and John Rundell, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1992, p. 93.

²⁸ Most historians of the French Revolution differentiate between its different phases, and would hence challenge the notion that the rise of Robespierre and Jacobinism could be traced back to 1789, but for Burke there was no substantial difference between 1789 and 1793. For the view of revolutionary violence as “an authentic act of liberation” see Žižek’s recent commentary on Lenin in Slavoj Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates*, London, Verso, 2002, especially pp. 259-61. For a persuasive critique of this argument see for example Jörg Lau, “Auf der Suche nach dem guten Terror: Über Slavoj Žižek,” *Merkur*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2003, pp. 158-63.

²⁹ S.N. Eisenstadt, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 72.

³⁰ Boris Kapustin, “Modernity’s Failure/Post-Modernity’s Predicament: The Case of Russia,” *Critical Horizons*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2003. While Kapustin develops his argument with respect to Russia, some of his insights could be applied also to Central Europe.

³¹ Richard Sakwa, *Postcommunism*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1999, p. 89.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

- ³³ Kapustin, "Modernity's Failure," p. 102.
- ³⁴ Johann P. Arnason, "The Post-Mode and Its Pretensions," in *Civilizations in Dispute*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2003, p. 341.
- ³⁵ I do not find it helpful to describe, as Kapustin does, the failed economic reforms in Russia "the post-modernisation of the economy," and the failures of the current political system in Russia as "Communism's relapse into post-modernity." One does not need to accept that there was only one path open to Russia after the collapse of communism, to maintain that it is meaningful to talk about relative successes and failures of certain political and economic measures. The conceptual confusion is best encapsulated in the description of the current economic predicament as "the post-modern capitalistic re-feudalisation of Russia." Kapustin, "Modernity's Failure," pp. 127, 31, 29.
- ³⁶ Arnason, "The Post-Mode and Its Pretensions," pp. 339-46.
- ³⁷ David Gress, *From Plato to Nato: The Idea of the West and Its Opponents*, New York, Free Press, 1998.
- ³⁸ Edmund Burke and J.C.D. Clark, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 2001.
- ³⁹ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2003. For a useful overview of nineteenth century critical responses to the French Revolution see, for example, Timothy O'Hagan, "Liberal Critics of the French Revolution," in *Revolution and Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Timothy O'Hagan, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1991.
- ⁴⁰ Edmund Burke and Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, pp. 89-91.
- ⁴¹ Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*, p. 320.
- ⁴² *Reflections on the revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*. As J.C.D. Clark argued, Burke "did not defend an old world against a new world; he defended his modern world (Whig, commercial, rational, patrician, Anglican) against assault by atavistic moral, intellectual and political vices." Burke and Clark, *Reflections*, p. 89. In line with this, a number of contemporary political theorists and historians seek to reclaim the heritage of Edmund Burke, and present him partly as a predecessor of liberalism. See, for example, Gress, *From Plato to Nato*; Lawrence E. Cahoone, *Civil Society: The Conservative Meaning of Liberal Politics*, Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 2002, pp. 6, 119; Martin Greenberg, "Burke & Political Liberty," *New Criterion*, vol. 20, no. 7, 2002.
- ⁴³ Burke and Clark, *Reflections*, p. 181.
- ⁴⁴ See, in greater detail, Stefan Auer, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe*, London, Routledge, 2004.

- ⁴⁵ Kim Lane Scheppele, "The New Hungarian Constitutional Court," *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1999; László Sólyom and Georg Brunner, *Constitutional Judiciary in a New Democracy: The Hungarian Constitutional Court*, Ann Arbor, Mich., University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 219.
- ⁴⁶ Havel in *Lidové noviny* 11.9.92; cf. also Václav Havel, *Letní přemítání*, Praha, Odeon, 1991, pp. 111-5.
- ⁴⁷ Edmund Burke, "Speech on American Taxation, 19 April 1774," in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. William B. Todd and Paul Langford, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 417.
- ⁴⁸ Edmund Burke, "Speech on Conciliation with America, 22 March 1775," in *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, ed. David Bromwich, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 92.
- ⁴⁹ Irving Kristol, "The American Revolution as a Successful Revolution," in *America's Continuing Revolution*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, Anchor Press, 1976, p. 4. For a more recent formulation of this argument see for example Susan Dunn, *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light*, New York, Faber and Faber, 1999.
- ⁵⁰ According to Harvey C. Mansfield, Burke never systematically addressed this apparent paradox, though he touches on it in a letter to William Windham, written in 1797. See Edmund Burke and Harvey Claflin Mansfield, *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 216.
- ⁵¹ Cited in Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in Eastern Europe*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2003, p. 183.
- ⁵² "And what of 1776 and 1688 and 1640?" asked Krishan Kumar rhetorically. "The literature on 1989 is noticeably thin on references to these revolutions, by comparison with later ones." Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 119.
- ⁵³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 49.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- ⁵⁶ Thaa, *Die Wiedergeburt des Politischen*, p. 142.
- ⁵⁷ Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Paradoxes of Democracy: Fragility, Continuity, and Change*, Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1999, p. 58.
- ⁵⁸ Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*, trans. Olga Amsterdamska and Gene M. Moore, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 75. Consider also the work of Józef Tischner and Michnik's response to it. Adam Michnik and David Ost, *The Church and the Left*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993; Tischner, *Etika Solidarity*, Bratislava, Kalligram, 1998. More recently, a number of Polish intellectuals and politicians advocated

that the new European constitution, proposed by the Convention on the Future of Europe, would refer to God in the preamble. According to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Poland's first postcommunist Prime Minister, leaving God out of the constitution is like "someone cutting the Cathedral of Notre Dame out of a Paris album." Cited in *Time*, June 16, 2003, 161:24, [<http://www.time.com/time/Europe/magazine>]. A similar argument was also advanced by the former Polish Foreign Minister, Bronisław Geremek: Consider that even Voltaire talked about "Christian Europe." Bronisław Geremek, "Europe: United or Divided? Enlargement and Future of the European Union" (paper presented at the Irish Central European Dialogues, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, March 26, 2004).

- ⁵⁹ Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 341. For more background material on the Charter 77 and the original version of this document see Jan Patočka, "O provinnosti brání se proti bezpráví," in *Charta 77*, ed. Vilém Prečan, Bratislava, Archa, 1990, pp. 31-33.
- ⁶⁰ Václav Havel, *Letters to Olga: June 1979-September 1982*, New York, Knopf, 1988, pp. 352-5.
- ⁶¹ Cf. Burke's preoccupation with the importance of the awareness of "human finitude" and the role of the sublime in politics. See White, *Edmund Burke*.
- ⁶² Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death, Religion and Postmodernism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995. For a convincing critique of Derrida's reading of Patočka see Edward F. Findlay, "Secrets of European Responsibility: Jacques Derrida on Responsibility in the Philosophy of Jan Patočka," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2002.
- ⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, "Attempts to Escape the Logic of Capitalism," *London Review of Books*, 1999, 4.
- ⁶⁴ Gress, *From Plato to Nato*, p. 489.
- ⁶⁵ Arato, *Civil Society*, p. 48.
- ⁶⁶ Incidentally, it is worth noting that Havel allowed for the possibility that violence may be justifiable "as a necessary evil in extreme situations, when direct violence can only be met by violence and where remaining passive would in effect mean supporting violence: let us recall, for example, that the blindness of European pacifism was one of the factors that prepared the ground for the Second World War." Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," p. 71. In line with this, Havel was able to endorse, if not without qualification, the US led invasion of Iraq.
- ⁶⁷ Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*, p. 106. Michnik made this argument firstly in Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 86-7.
- ⁶⁸ Arato, *Civil Society*, p. xiv. This approach found its legal expression in one of the key decisions of the newly established Hungarian constitutional court ("On

Retroactive Criminal Legislation,' 5 March 1992). It was justified thus: "The change of system has been carried out on the basis of legality. . . . The old law retains its validity. With respect to its validity, there is no distinction between 'pre-Constitution' and 'post-Constitution' law. The legitimacy of the different (political) systems during the past half century is irrelevant from this perspective; that is from the viewpoint of the constitutionality of laws, it does not comprise a meaningful category." Sólyom and Brunner, *Constitutional Judiciary in a New Democracy*, p. 220.

⁶⁹ Arato, *Civil Society*, p. xiv.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷¹ Elzbieta Matynia, "Furnishing Democracy at the End of the Century: The Polish Round Table and Others," *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2001, p. 457.

⁷² Ulrich Preuss cited in William E. Scheuerman, "The Rule of Law at Century's End," *Political Theory*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1997.

⁷³ Jiří Suk, *Labyrinthem revoluce*, Prague, Prostor, 2003, pp. 72-73.

⁷⁴ Tadeusz Mazowiecki was hence able to proclaim in August 1989: "One has return to Poland the mechanisms of normal political life. The transition is difficult, but it does not have to cause shaking. On the contrary, it will be a path to normalcy." Tadeusz Mazowiecki, "A Solidarity Government Takes Power," in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945*, ed. Gale Stokes, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 229.

⁷⁵ Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, pp. 335-6.

⁷⁶ Jerzy Jedlicki, "The Revolution of 1989: The Unbearable Burden of History," *Problems of Communism*, 1990, pp. 39-45.

⁷⁷ Auer, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe*.

⁷⁸ This is the main reason why "Burke's remains an incomplete vision of politics." For an insightful discussion of Burke's shortcomings with respect to the issues of equality in a politically liberal society see, for example, Frank M. Turner, "Edmund Burke: The Political Actor Thinking," in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003, pp. xxxix-xli.

⁷⁹ Cahoone, *Civil Society*, p. 119.

⁸⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 104.

⁸¹ "No statesman, no political figure of any importance could possibly take them seriously; and none of the liberal or radical parties in Europe thought it necessary to incorporate into their program a new declaration on human rights." Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1966, p. 292.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁸³ Burke in O'Brien, "Introduction," p. 23.

- ⁸⁴ Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," p. 71.
- ⁸⁵ G.M. Tamás, "The Legacy of Dissent," in *The Revolutions of 1989*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 188.
- ⁸⁶ David Ost, for example, in his influential study of Solidarity insists on labelling this movement as a leftist group, or, taking into consideration its peculiar relationship towards ideology, "a postmodern left." David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, p. 16.
- ⁸⁷ Eric Foner, "Introduction," in *Thomas Paine: Rights of Man*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, p. 11.
- ⁸⁸ See H. Gordon Skilling, *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia*, London, Scribner, 1981, p. 211, and Stokes, *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, p. 170.
- ⁸⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Politics without Cliché," in *Real Politics: At the Center of Everyday Life*, Baltimore, Md., Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 3-11.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁹¹ Consider, for example, Sakwa's discussion of the aims of the 1989 revolutions: "These revolutions were directed not to fulfil the Marxist promise but to transcend it." Sakwa, *Postcommunism*, p. 91. In a similar vein, Arato characterised the concept of civil society, which emerged in Central Europe, as "post-Marxist." Arato, *Civil Society*, p. 43. Finally, when John Keane interviewed Michnik, shortly before the collapse of communism, he was perplexed by the fact that Michnik believes in the importance of compromise, which "has its roots in the early conservative tradition." Michnik, in response, was at ease transcending ideological boundaries and looking for inspiration by thinkers as different as Hannah Arendt, Edmund Burke, George Orwell, and Albert Camus. He pointed out that "the philosophy of compromise is a philosophy which recognizes quandaries. The philosophy of radicalism, revolution, demagoguery, and violence, by contrast, takes an easier path, although [...] it produces the guillotine and not democracy. From its inception the left failed to recognize this. It lacked an understanding of the conservative perspective." Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*, p. 110.
- ⁹² Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 225.
- ⁹³ Leszek Kołakowski, "How to Be a Conservative-Liberal Socialist," *Encounter*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1978. For more recent restatements of Kołakowski's provocative argument see Ferenc Fehér, "1989 and the Deconstruction of Political Monism," *Thesis Eleven*, 42, 1995, 96, 100-4 and Krygier, "Conservative-Liberal-Socialism."

Maria R. Márkus

In Search of a Home In Honour of Agnes Heller on her 75th Birthday

ABSTRACT

One of the many themes to which Agnes Heller's philosophy returns again and again is the theme of the home of the moderns. Although not necessarily her central philosophical theme, nonetheless, it opens onto the existential and multi-dimensional nature of the human condition in modernity, which her work permanently addresses.

KEYWORDS: Agnes Heller; modernity, home, culture, politics

In one of her interviews Agnes Heller protested against speaking about herself, about her own biography, saying, that she is not old enough to retreat into memories.¹ Yet, not only has she given a whole series of more-or-less personal interviews, some short and some quite lengthy ones, like the *Monkey on the Bicycle* or an earlier Italian interview with Adornato, but also some of her philosophical works are written in a semi-autobiographical manner, for example her *An Ethics of Personality*.² It would be probably justified to ask: Why?

After all, philosophy aspires to truth, independent of the biographical particularities of its cultivators. What is said must somehow

be more important than who is saying it. How, then, does the biography of the author impact, if at all, on the things that are said? It first of all depends clearly on the kind of philosophy in question, which is far from a uniform activity, today even less than in the past. It ranges from following a scientific model of argumentation to posing unresolved questions or outlining some sort of a vision. I am not sure that the love life or other passions of various authors are of primary importance in this respect, but the particular context from which their thinking emerged and their personality mostly is.

In this regard, part of the answer here can be found in Heller's very emphatic, and often repeated, statements concerning the idiosyncratic nature of philosophical enterprise as she wishes and does practice it. In "A Reply to my Critics," for example, she wholeheartedly endorses György Márkus' characterisation of her work as belonging to the type of philosophical authorship which does not strive to construct any kind of a closed philosophical system, but rather to "the ever renewed effort of the thinking individual to make sense of the historically and socially contingent flow of experiences—communal and personal, intellectual and practical—to make sense out of it in the light, and with the help, of the tradition called philosophy."³

By defining her philosophy as idiosyncratic Heller means that it has nothing to do with any 'ism', just with herself. This can be an over-statement, but to a degree at least it is true in a sense that—being influenced by the past and present philosophical discourses and being part of an on-going exchange of ideas—she does not attach herself to any of the existing philosophical schools or tendencies, but rather creatively appropriates various new issues and concepts raised partly by other authors, without necessarily engaging in any direct and explicit theoretical confrontation with them. She does not pretend 'to know better'. According to her, the very plurality of perspectives contributes to the fuller description of the human condition and human possibilities.

What she constantly engages herself with are the emerging political and cultural events, the issues impacting upon the everyday life of the women and men around her. As aptly noted by John Grumley in the "Introduction" to his book on Heller, "She has the rare capacity to transform the everyday into

philosophy and bring philosophy to bear on the everyday; she is always in tune with the contingent flow of historical experience and able to absorb from diverse contemporary intellectual influences those with affinity into her own idiosyncratic perspective.”⁴

This approach could lead to eclecticism or even to a theoretical chaos, but in Agnes Heller’s case it certainly does not. It does not because behind all of the appropriations and *ad hoc* reactions stands an author who is not building a philosophical system, who does not wish to bring her thinking from the ‘continuous flux’ to any un-revisable conclusion, but whose theoretical passion is clearly centred on certain core ideas, among which—descriptively—modern contingency, and—normatively—the value of freedom, occupy the privileged positions. Although Heller’s work now spans almost fifty years of scholarly endeavour, and crosses various theoretical and political transformations, it has achieved a considerable level of consistency by being centred on these two descriptive and normative ideas.

Nonetheless, in the aforementioned “A Reply to my Critics,” she defines her work on *Everyday Life*, published in 1970 in Hungarian and in 1984 in English translation, as a turning point in her philosophy and as the beginning of her very own idiosyncratic philosophical voice.⁵ It is from here on that—through some quite drastic further changes—her philosophy still continues to unfold. One of its many threads that continues to unravel from here is the theme of the home of the moderns. This is philosophically perhaps not the most central theme that emerges from her investigation of the human condition—a term that is introduced into her understanding of the structure of the everyday life and various spheres of objectivation, under the influence of her encounter with Hannah Arendt’s work. Yet, ‘home’ is important enough for her to return to it again and again, from the review of Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, through to her “Where are we at home?” and in her parallel lecture for Australian Radio National on “The Europeans,” to *A Theory of Modernity*.⁶ On each of these occasions the theme of home recurs again and again.

The search for ‘home’ is of course nothing else than a search for the stable links that connects us to others, for the world in which we can live, interact

and communicate with others on equal terms, on the terms of symmetric reciprocity. To be sure, there are many possible homes. As human beings, we are born into a 'home', an 'intersubjectively' given world with a centre that provides us not only with a shelter (physical and emotional) but which also enables us to become what we can become, teaching us the minimum social skills and rules of dealing with things and people. This home is indispensable, but today we rarely stay there for long. We neither want to, nor can we. As being born into a particular place loses its force of stratification and increasingly defines only *what* we are but not *who* we can become (to use Arendt's vocabulary), our attachment to a place as our home weakens, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. We leave home, stretch our wings and expand our world. In that, however, we can easily lose the 'centre'.

Most homes have both spatial and temporal dimensions. However there is an observable tendency of the declining importance of home as a geographically defined space and a commensurate privileging of temporality in the experience of home. This becomes possible in modernity due to the global synchronisation of time; nowadays—says Heller—we all live in the same time and in the same history. But where a temporal dimension alone takes over the experience of home, the latter loses its empirical/sensual and, thus, emotional flavour. The human condition of modernity is that of historical-social contingency, which is not the same as an accident of birth, and it does not render this accident irrelevant. As Heller puts it, we moderns, from whichever walk of life and with whatever endowments, are being 'thrown into freedom', out of which we have 'to choose ourselves'.⁷

To choose ourselves means to construct our own world out of the infinite possibilities that are open to us under the modern human condition. In constructing our world in the absolute present time, however, we easily lose the meaning-providing centre, leading to a meaning-deficit and homelessness. For, while contingency allows us to create our own worlds, it does not automatically connect us either to others or even to our own past. We cannot, however, live without a past and without a living history. We cannot live a meaningful life without the shared memory of ourselves and of that history.

In "Where are we at home?" Heller illustrates two poles of the contemporary experience of home. On the one hand, there is a person, who has never

left his home into which he has been born. His is a space-bound home of familiarity, of stability, of 'knowing the ways' and sharing the 'taken-for-granted'. He knows *about* other worlds, after all he is a modern person and there is a lot of people passing by and telling their stories. However, he does not know these other worlds, let alone have them. Such an 'appointed' home is a constricting home, a limiting one, it does not allow a person to live up fully to his or her contingency (and the freedom provided by it). Heller's man, bound to the world of familiarity, does things as he has done for time immemorial; he lives according to traditions of his ancestors, even when he uses a modern refrigerator or a brand new stove. His is thus not a modern 'home', although it is still a home for many people in modernity and for the majority on the fringes of modernity.

On the other pole, though, there is another type, a type of explicitly modern experience of home. This is the home of a 'cosmopolitan' career-woman, travelling with her business all over the world from London to Singapore and from Paris to Hong Kong, doing the same things everywhere, speaking about the same issues, eating the same food and residing in the same type of hotels. Hers is a temporal home, without spatial dimensions and without a centre. It is a familiar world but not a sensual one. She is at home everywhere but really nowhere. She is not even a 'universal tourist'. She does have a world (not just knows it), but the dimensions of her world are rather shallow. They are without depth and all in the same present tense. In such a world, there is no past and thus no future either and there is no centre. Nostalgia settles in for there are even no real memories; there are no others to remember together with. Nostalgia is not a constructive feeling; it does not awaken remembrance. For remembering demands others with whom we can remember together, giving our memories the taste and texture of the shared past experience. Where there is no one with whom we could share them, we can only yearn for the absent and this is what nostalgia is about. The chosen home thus becomes an exile. While exile could be (and often is) a chance to live with our freedom, it always involves pain and loss. As aptly put by Michael Ignatieff, "Because emigration, exile and expatriation are now the normal condition of existence, it is almost impossible to find the right words for rootedness and belonging. Our need for home is cast in the language of loss; indeed to have that need at all you have to be already homeless."⁸

Belonging thus becomes “retrospective rather than actual, remembered rather than experienced, imagined rather than felt.”⁹ But how can we remember and imagine while being cut off not only from the locus of the original experience but also from those with whom we have shared it?

According to the testimony of many famous exiles such as Breytenbach, Kundera, and Bauman, ‘the exile never returns’. He or she always remains a stranger. Heller herself points to something similar, when—slightly ironically—she follows the imagined future of the ‘heroine’ of her second story, who, after her retirement, goes back to where ‘the bones are buried’, and begins to search for her roots, without any knowledge and certainly without any experience of the real life of her ancestors.¹⁰ She continues with a similar observation in one of the footnotes to *A Theory of Modernity*, where she states,

The universal tourism and homesickness can be easily combined, if one undertakes long journeys to strange places from where one’s family departed a hundred years ago or more, searching for one’s roots. Americans of Polish or Jewish origin, for example, organise pilgrimages to search for their roots. They can arrive at a village, an entirely unfamiliar place about which they have been told that their great-grandfather had lived there, they look at the houses and fields, take pictures of the peasants and return (home?) with the satisfaction that they finally had been at home.¹¹

However, the issue is even more complicated than that. Even if a person herself lived in an ‘empirical spatial home’ full of various shared experiences but stayed away long enough, the return can be not only difficult but perhaps impossible. The ‘past cannot be really recaptured’, it cannot even be reconstructed; only constructed. For the memories of various participants in the common experiences of the past are fragmented and rarely fit each other. They don’t fit each other because the time and distance has engaged both the ‘home comer’ and those left behind into new relations and new experiences; they are no longer the same as they were. “You made your own history at the cost of not sharing theirs. The eyes, having seen too many different things, now see differently.”¹²

With the loss of such a spatial, sensual home, we have lost the shared ‘feeling of belonging made up of smells, sounds, gestures’, we have lost the common lived history. But we have also gained from this loss; we have gained

our freedom to choose ourselves. However, to only live in the abstractions of one-dimensional 'sensually empty present' is hardly an acceptable alternative for modern men and women. So Heller perseveres with the question "whether there is a privileged place for the moderns, a place that could still be described as the centre of their world," and which could fill up the meaning deficit characteristic of the absolute present.¹³ In other words, she asks whether modern men and women have a home?

Her answer is an affirmative, although cautious one. There are at least two other possible homes or 'simulacra of home' in modernity, which are not bereft of sensual dimensions, not totally functionalised or instrumentalised, but enjoyed for their own sake. At the same time, these things, which are, enjoyed for their own sake, whose 'being here is an end-in-itself', are—according to Heller—'home-makers'. They provide experiences we can (and have to) share with others in order for those experiences to be what they can be, that is to provide a 'home'. For Heller, these two—not so much alternative as complementary—homes of moderns can be found, on the one hand, in the sphere of 'absolute spirit' or European high culture, and on the other, in the particular, North American model of democracy. Both of these models have explicit, but not exclusively, spatial dimensions, and are able to address, although, perhaps not to cure, the 'sickness of meaning-deficit' of moderns living in the absolute present. However, each also has its share of problems in actually providing moderns with a home.

The ideal model of democracy, as it has emerged in North America, despite its disturbing empirical inadequacies, provides a home for the citizen. Its institutions, frame a form of life and fulfil the role of 'homemaker'. These institutions provide the grounding for an imaginary community, of which its citizens consider themselves equally responsible members, for which they care and are ready to act in various forms of political participation, although in most cases and for the majority of them the scope of such actions is rather limited. However, the American ideal model of democracy can function as a home only due to a very specific character of American constitutionalism, which differs substantively from the European models and which, therefore, cannot be simply taken over.¹⁴ In this sense it is a 'space-bound model' and in what form its applicability could be extended is at this stage an open question.

The model of a home provided by culture emerges, on the other hand, from the traditions of European history, especially of nineteenth century Europe, when culture and cultural discourses provided a 'natural home' for many members of the cultivated elites. Experience derived from the participation in this sphere is a lived experience not because it necessarily comes from 'experiencing together'; it is also lived by recollecting together and exchanging memories. Heller emphasises that this model should not be understood simply as a conglomerate of various artistic works and texts, but as including "all human relations—emotive and discursive bonds and ties that are mediated by this sphere."¹⁵ It is, thus, the discursive dimension of culture, a cultivated conversation involving not only the constant exercising of judgemental and reflective powers, but also the exchange of memories and of sensual experiences prompted by the debated texts that sustain the promise of the 'cultural home'. Heller herself compares this idea to Habermas' description of literary salons prior to their later development into the public sphere.¹⁶ I would add that this concept of a 'culture of conversation' lies somewhere between Habermas' ideas on discourse and Arendt's 'coming together to think in common'. It is weaker, more open than either of the above concepts; it is not oriented towards reaching any particular kind of practical agreement, although it is oriented toward mutual understanding and it does follow certain (loose) ethical norms.

However, not all is well in this home either. Despite, or perhaps even due to the increasing openness and 'cosmopolitanism' of this sphere, there is an ongoing expansion, pluralisation and fragmentation of the texts and interpretations, leading to the dissipation of this sphere into a series of the parallel 'mini-discourses', which do not communicate with each other. The world of culture itself becomes fragmented and to a degree at least instrumentalised.

Despite this theoretically underpinned caution, Heller maintains her wager and her passionate commitment to this sphere. She demonstrates this commitment in a number of ways. It is undoubtedly her own true and, perhaps, only stable home. She works hard at bringing others into this home not only through enthusiastically performing the role of public intellectual, always ready to participate in a discussion whenever required, but also in her private life by bringing people together to speak about philosophy, politics, art—or just to speak. Her talent for cultivating friendship and maintaining close

relationships with people, many of whom are far away, dispersed all over the world, is also a part of this commitment.

Without diminishing Heller's merits in this respect, it is perhaps worthwhile to add that her passion is not entirely idiosyncratic. She is quite correct in speaking about the previously mentioned European tradition of cultural conversation. Notably, in Eastern Central Europe this tradition has at least two separate threads. As already mentioned, one is the tradition of literary salons, especially popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The other is connected to the more politicised, often underground activities of 'cultural resistance', which has had the most spectacular and longest history in Poland, but have also been present in Hungary in all 'dark times'. While this latter aspect of the 'discursive tradition' has always been oriented to creating a home for the homeless, the former has been—understandably—far less dramatic and has been sustained chiefly by pleasure and not by danger. This, however, made it more amorphous, more fragile, and more discrete. However, on one of my own periodic returns to Hungary in the early nineteen-nineties, I was genuinely surprised by the virtual outbreak of not only public, but even more so, private debates and meetings dealing with everything from philosophy to literature, to history, to politics and economy and so on. Sometimes these were groups of friends or good acquaintances that met more-or-less regularly. Often, though, these groups were made up of total strangers, who, by some chance, had heard about a particular meeting and came, and were welcomed, to a private house to listen and to speak. This particular wave of discourses, however, was sustained not just by the private interest and pleasure of their participants, but also by a general euphoria of a regained freedom. It seems, therefore, that both 'bright times' and 'dark times' are conducive to such activities, but the 'grey times' of the everyday tend to separate the people again and to maintain their homelessness.

It could well be that it is our modern fate to remain strangers who only from time-to time peep into their far-away home and see some familiar faces. If this is so—and if we listen to Agnes Heller—then it is worthwhile to try at least to transform this peeping into regular meaningful visits.

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Notes

- ¹ See Rozsa Erzsebet, *Agnes Heller, A Fronzeis Filozofusa*, Osiris, 1997, pp. 247-299.
- ² A. Heller/Kobanyai, *Monkey on a Bicycle*, 1998; *An Ethics of Personality*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996.
- ³ See A. Heller in ed. J. Burnheim, *The Social Philosophy of Agnes Heller*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1994, p. 282; and György Márkus, *ibid.*, p. 258.
- ⁴ J. Grumley, *A Moralism in the Flux of History: The Philosophy of Agnes Heller*, Pluto Press, London, 2004.
- ⁵ See Heller in Burnheim, *The Social Philosophy of Agnes Heller*, p. 283.
- ⁶ See A. Heller, "World, Things, Life and Home," *Thesis Eleven*, 1992, No. 33, pp. 69-84; "Where are we at Home?" *Thesis Eleven*, 1995, no. 41, pp. 1-18; lecture for Australian Radio National on "The Europeans"; *A Theory of Modernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999.
- ⁷ A. Heller, *A Philosophy of History in Fragments*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, p. 16.
- ⁸ M. Ignatieff, *The Russian Album*, Vintage, London, 1994, p. 1.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Heller, "Where are we at Home?" p. 7.
- ¹¹ Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*, p. 292, footnote 21.
- ¹² Breyten Breytenbach, "The Long March from Hearth to Heart," *Social Research*, 1991, vol. 58/1, Spring, p. 81.
- ¹³ Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*, p. 190.
- ¹⁴ Heller, "Where are we at Home?" pp. 11-12.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ¹⁶ Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*, p. 278, footnote 33.

Agnes Heller

The Unmasking of the Metaphysicians or the Deconstructing of Metaphysics?

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that Popper's work, seen from the vantage point of increasing historical distance, can be viewed as the first attempt to understand the grand narrative as the adjustment of metaphysics to the modern world. When viewed from such a distance enduring questions regarding holism, identity, essentialism, and truth can once again be thrown into relief, together with the pressing issues of the paradox of freedom and sovereignty.

KEYWORDS: Popper, grand narrative, critique of metaphysics, sovereignty, freedom

I

When I accepted an invitation to a conference on the work of Karl Popper held recently,¹ I immediately decided to write something on two of his books—*The Open Society* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. I read these books forty years ago and I thought that I remembered them quite clearly. Surely I had not forgotten that Popper treated Plato and Hegel with gross injustice. But I put these books into their relevant historical perspective, along side Lukács' *Destruction of Reason* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Given

the overwhelming trauma of the twentieth century, that is, the emergence of the two totalitarian regimes, and their support by, among others, learned people, intellectuals—soul searching became an indispensable duty. Modern men and women, however, ask their questions (whether wittingly or unwittingly) historically; thus soul searching is transformed by them into the search for historical roots, causes, reasons, and traditions, which allegedly prepared the way for totalitarianism, directly or indirectly. Philosophers, for their part, look for the roots of the ills in philosophy, and since they look for them they will also find them. Even prior to those learned cultural critics, Adorno and Horkheimer, the entire modern age and all kinds of enlightenment already stood accused. Indeed, both Lukács and Popper juxtaposed a remedy to the ills of the modern, post-enlightened age themselves. In the case of Lukács, the remedy was called ‘dialectics’ and ‘Marx’; in Popper’s case it was called ‘critical rationalism’. Both advocated faith in Reason.

After I re-read Popper’s books, I did not change my mind in respect to my assessment of their role in a given historical milieu. I would even add to my former ruminations that Popper defended a good thing politically, namely the open society, or liberal democracy. Yet we are now living in an entirely different historical situation, which dramatically changes the function of these books. The European totalitarian regimes are fortunately things of the past, and contemporary closed societies do not have anything whatsoever to do with European philosophical traditions. One could still imagine that the speech by bin Laden, televised just after September 11 and describing the anti-Islamic war waged by Christians and Jews since the time of the Crusades, was a kind of ‘grand narrative’. Yet no one in his or her right mind would connect such a narrative to Hegel or Marx. These books have to speak for themselves, or they do not speak to us at all.

Thus, by rereading these books I was confronted merely with their content, their arguments, and their rhetoric. At first glance, I was stuck by their irrelevance. I almost gave this essay the title “The Poverty of Unmasking.” Popper constantly practised the method of unmasking when it came to the so-called ‘enemies’ of freedom and reason, even though he rejected unmasking as a method of the sociologists of knowledge, such as Mannheim. To brand certain philosophers ‘enemies’, even if only enemies of something specific, is a

rhetorical device of inquisition and not of liberalism. The Devil is the Enemy. The enemy is dangerous and destructive; it does not deserve fair treatment. Popper is true to his rhetoric, when he (in opposition to the method of critical rationalism) admits into his theorising about Aristotle or Hegel as few interpreted facts as possible, and of these, many which do not even qualify for his own very limited theory of truth. In other words, he states many things that in fact are not the case.

Let me mention one example. Popper discusses Aristotle's proposal concerning the definition of concepts, his discussion of the identity of an individual *ousia*, and his conception of *arche*, as if these three had the same referent! No Master's student could get away with that. Making radical statements, dismissing a philosopher as irrelevant or dangerous is, in itself, still a legitimate rhetorical device in philosophy. *Sic volo, sic jubeo*. Nietzsche also does it frequently, especially with regards to Plato. But Nietzsche's rhetoric is open, straightforward, and not hidden behind the cloak of scientific discovery. I would certainly admit along with Hegel, that philosophy in general can be dangerous. Hegel also went onto remark that it remains interesting and important only if it is dangerous. I would add that philosophy is dangerous first and foremost for the philosopher. Indeed, the ideological and political reception of philosophy by certain movements and institutions can in fact be socially dangerous, sometimes for tyrants, sometimes for personal and social freedoms, or, in various ways and times. It can be dangerous to any of these, yet one cannot know or see in advance to which and when.

Thus, in the case of these two Popper books, their rhetoric and their method are ill fitted. Popper does not make it clear to himself whether he confronts sciences or philosophies. He mixes up the modern concept of *science* with that of *episteme*. At the very beginning of *The Poverty of Historicism*, Popper claims to have finally found the best arguments to refute historicism: because he is now able to prove that one cannot predict the future. I disregard the obvious protest of the reader: neither Plato nor Hegel maintained that we *could* predict the future. Hegel made the strongest case against such attempts (here is Rhodus, here you dance, one cannot jump over Rhodus!) Marx alone could be found guilty on this count, yet it is only Marx who Popper treats with kid gloves. Even if we disregard these obvious and grave objections,

two moot points still remain. First, that this discovery (one cannot make true statements about the future) is two thousand three hundred years old, proposed in fact by that deeply despised 'essentialist' called Aristotle. Second, if I were to follow the method of Popper's own philosophy, then I would have to say that a theory open to falsification is a scientific theory. Thus historicism could make valid claims for being scientific, something which Popper would be the last to admit. It is better to say (or I think so at least) that philosophies in general are not open to falsification, rather than saying that one can falsify them hundreds of times, and that this will not hurt them. One can only turn away from them because they have become irrelevant. For this will hurt them. I do not reproach Popper for his attempts to falsify metaphysics and the grand narratives, because here he only followed in the footsteps of his philosophical predecessors, Aristotle and Hegel included. (The first has allegedly refuted Plato, the second, Kant.) My question is only whether this attempt remains fruitful or not under present philosophical conditions. And if not, the question remains: what is still fruitful about the approach of Popper's two books, if anything at all?

When I reached this point in my inquiry, I decided to forget the forty or fifty years of the previous century, the original contexts in which these two books were written and first read. I thus placed the same books into the present context—the deconstruction and destruction of metaphysics. I decided to disregard the muddled analyses, the unjust accusations, and the irrelevant cases of unmasking, and to look at these texts as the first attempt to understand the grand narrative as the adjustment of metaphysics to the modern world. I think that Popper often put his finger on issues that we now see as real ones, and now constantly address with much artistry, although with neither final judgments nor results, for we are no longer seeking these.

In what follows, I will first address the general issue, namely the grand narrative as the consummation of metaphysics through its negation. I will then address concrete problems related to it, such as holism, identity, essentialism, and truth before finally scrutinising two fundamental questions that Popper pointed to in *The Open Society*: the paradox of freedom and the question of sovereignty.

II

Hegel explicitly emphasised his debt to Plato and Aristotle several times. It is sufficient to remember the preface of his *Philosophy of Right* and the ending (the punch line) of his *Encyclopaedia*, respectively. In the former, Hegel paid tribute to Plato's *Republic* and pointed to the similarity between his theory of the state and that of Plato. Certainly, his interpretation of Plato was almost the exact opposite of that of Popper. In Hegel's view, Plato was far from being a utopian and did not make any attempt at social engineering. He just described the state, as it existed in his times, in an idealised and normative manner. Hegel, or so he claimed, was doing something very similar in the way he described the state and society of his own times. Hegel also draws our attention to the circumstance that in matters of political philosophy as well as moral philosophy, the philosopher's imagination is fairly limited. One cannot jump over one's own historical experience. Hegel's interpretation of Plato stands to reason, for he did not expect Plato to affirm a so-called 'open society' which had never yet existed nor was even dreamt of in his age. At the same time, Hegel underlined his commitment to an idealising and normative description of the state of his age, as well as in Plato's age, while presenting the very model of the modern state (and society) in this manner. Hegel's model of the modern state was not utopian and he was anything but an advocate of any closed society. On the contrary, he gave solid reasons why Plato's model had to remain a closed one, whilst he himself could model an open society. His account, in brief, is that no civil society could exist in ancient times because there was no mediation between the family and the state. This is why the world remained homogeneous. The modern world, on the other hand, through the mediation of civil society, became pluralistic and thus heterogeneous.

Popper put his finger on something very important about Hegel's account. Hegel's idealised and normative description of the modern state, albeit neither utopian nor advocating social engineering or collectivism, still performed a traditional metaphysical task. By presenting his model Hegel inserted political philosophy (the normative and idealised description of the *de facto* modern state) into a philosophical system that embraced the world as a whole. The thus-described social world hence constituted several paragraphs of the section on Objective Spirit in the story of the philosophy of Spirit, which itself

was meant as the consummation of the system as a whole and therefore closed the whole system. Hegel's model of the state is not 'closed,' but his system itself is. And it is so because a philosophical system is meant to be closed. And for Hegel authentic philosophy was still identified with a system. Perhaps (almost?) for the last time. Popper saw the other side of the coin, too, namely that metaphysics in Hegel's times could be rescued from its demise—by historicising it.

Popper dwelt a good deal on the critique of the hierarchical structure in Plato's *Republic* and in Aristotle's *Politics*. There are several gross simplifications in his analysis, which, in the main, stem from his a-historical perspective. Although it is true that in Plato's times there thrived a kind of questioning which inquired into and tested traditional values, and named certain truths as prejudices (as with some sophists, who are the heroes for Popper), such devaluating practices had another function and entirely different consequences then, than the same practices have today in our modern society. Whereas a modern, open society cannot survive without constantly testing its truths and norms, traditional societies had been destroyed by the same practice. Hegel gave an answer to the question 'why' this was the case in the chapter on Enlightenment in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. But this is only the half of the story. The second half must also be told.

The second half of the story concerns the overall structure of metaphysical systems. Although Plato was not yet a conscious system builder, this is true about his work too. Metaphysical systems are replicas of a hierarchical world order. They are not necessarily thought out as such, yet such they are. The metaphysical space is ordered hierarchically. At the top is the *real*: reality, reason, command, immortality, infinitude, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, spirituality, and so on. At the bottom there is matter, obedience, sensuality, mortality, finitude, and so on. At the top Truth, at the bottom mere opinion. Thus, at a time when the deconstruction or destruction of the social hierarchy had gained momentum, which was symbolised by the decapitation of two kings, the traditional metaphysical systems also began to crumble. The Hegelian system was (besides many other things), an ingenious device to rescue metaphysics by reorganising its space, substituting time for space, and thereby redirecting the Absolute from the very Beginning to the very Result. This is what Popper detected in Hegel's historicism. And even if he misin-

terpreted all of what Hegel said, he still understood what he wanted to rescue from Hegel. And, I repeat, Hegel had by no means hidden his own rescue mission, as this was spelled out when the summary of the system, the *Encyclopaedia*, is closed with a quotation by Aristotle (from *Metaphysics* 1072b 18-30) on a God who *is* Reason, Life and Eternity. Absolute Knowing, the philosophical contemplation of the Absolute, had to be the end of the tale, the happy ending. Without a tale, without a story, there is no happy ending. The story—in order to have its happy ending, ‘the whole as the truth’—had to be a universal story that ends with the Whole.

Popper writes: “But is there really no such thing as universal history in the sense of a concrete history of mankind? There can be none.” Popper argues that history has no meaning because ‘history’, in the sense in which most people speak of it, does not exist. Rather, “there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.”² Needless to say, Popper shares a kind of philosophically naive ‘taken-for-granted-ness’ with the metaphysical thinkers. A concrete history of humankind does not exist, so far so good. However, neither Hegel nor Marx claimed that there was one. From this, however, it does not follow that a universal history of mankind is just nonsense. Moreover, if there is no Meaning in History, there are no meanings in histories either, be they as many and as concrete as they may. Since Popper realises that in matters of the Meaning of History, he clashes with the tradition of the Christian faith, he switches his position and limits his critique to the universal history of power. In other words, he realises that the grand narrative is also exploited by the Christian tradition, or history as History of Redemption. In order for History to have a meaning, it has to be understood teleologically, as the road leading towards redemption. Without such a teleological presupposition, which in fact both Kant and Hegel acknowledge (Popper remains silent about Kant), no statement about the Meaning of History will make sense, not even the statement that although History has no Meaning, we (humans) render meaning to History, which is nonsensical in this context unless we advocate the deification of humankind.

Popper also notices that Marx replaced the divine *telos* with the so-called developmental laws of History. However, because he liked Marx better than Hegel, he failed to see that by doing so in the spirit of nineteenth century scientific ideology, Marx destroyed the philosophical justification of the

Meaning in History. For if one acknowledges any hidden end or purpose in history, the holistic concept of History itself is not the precondition of the meaningful story. However, if one speaks of the laws of historical development, one has to presuppose a holistic Concept of History, and its identity right from the start. This is obvious if one compares metaphysical thinking with nineteenth century scientific thinking. Metaphysical thinking always stuck to the Aristotelian conception of the four causes: material, formal, efficient and final. According to the whole metaphysical tradition including Hegel's grand narrative, an event or an entity which is determined by efficient causes alone is by definition contingent, for only an event which is also determined by (a) final cause(s) can be called necessary. Some metaphysicians, for example Leibniz, maintained that every historical fact is as such contingent, and Hegel would have been the last to deny it. Every historical fact is contingent insofar as we understand it by its efficient causes alone and disregard its final cause. That is, something, an event or an entity, participates in necessity insofar as it is determined by final causes; which means that in History, everything is necessary only insofar it contains the tendency towards the final End of History, the Truth of History, the Whole.

I wanted to underscore the metaphysical preconditions of the Hegelian grand narrative in order to support Popper's intuition. My personal interpretation, that by rescuing the categories of metaphysics in his narrative Hegel destroyed metaphysics, does not belong to this essay. By returning to Marx and to the replacement of metaphysical categories with nineteenth century scientific categories of developmental laws, I can now turn to the questions of holism and identity, two issues Popper criticised and explored.

III

In light of the issue under discussion, the criticism of holism and the question of identity are intertwined. In order to explore this further let me return for one moment to the previously mentioned issue: if the Whole is the Truth, and the Truth of History is the final result of History, then the identity of History is presupposed. History is something that remains identical throughout all changes. Hegel knew this well. The identity of History is clearly stated in his system—it is Reason in its capacity as World Spirit. It is then World Spirit that changes yet remains World Spirit, that is, identical with itself. As

has been frequently pointed out, his model is the single individual who becomes entirely himself through the self-determinations of his own history. Yet if one gives up the concept of the World Spirit, and since the second half of the nineteenth century one has had to give it up—let me speak here ironically—exactly because of the changes in the spirit of the times, which was the faith in a certain understanding of science, then the identity of the entity called World History cannot be established. More precisely, the identity of History could not be established through any interpretation of the concept of History, but only by making strong statements about the so-called laws of historical development. This was the Marxian gambit, which Popper equally rejected with full justification. Needless to say, the Marxian gambit came to the rescue of metaphysics at this decisive point, replacing a so-called idealistic metaphysics with a so-called materialist one. He paid a price for this change (since everything has a price). Marx had to reintroduce universal laws into history, which had already been rejected by Hegel as primitive and abstract figments of the human imagination. It was only in this way that he could rescue the identity of Universal History in the nineteenth century.

Here I can return to my previous remark. All major critical arguments made by Popper against the main culprits of holism could be refuted by following the Popperian model of refutation, but this seems to be irrelevant. In fact, Popper distinguishes two kinds of holism.³ I will disregard the second kind, for this is not the place to discuss *Gestalt* psychology. The first kind of holism is described by Popper as a theory that establishes “the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of all the relations holding between constituent parts [. . .]”⁴ And he adds a few pages later that such totalistic entities “cannot be made objects of scientific study.”⁵ Yet here he is knocking at an open door. The above description fits only the theory of individual substance in Aristotle and in Leibniz. Both philosophers emphasised, however, that the individual substance, the essence, is precisely that which cannot be the object of scientific inquiry—not just in the spirit of modern sciences, but also in the understanding of scientific thinking as *episteme*. Every individual substance, Aristotle said, includes contingency, and nothing contingent can be the object of scientific understanding. Yet Popper’s remedy does not cure this patient, if he needs to be cured at all. Popper argues, namely in his closing remarks, that only single historical events are relevant objects of scientific inquiry. He surmises further that (in contrast to the holistic

nightmare) solid research into a single, concrete historical event will select only the relevant facts, neglecting the irrelevant ones, and that only this selective work makes the event the object of history as science. Contemporary admirers of hermeneutics would tell us that both Popper and Aristotle hit the nail on the head. In making sense of historical events one must be selective, yet since every single historical event has infinite determinations, all interpretations will be different from all other interpretations. That is, no *episteme*, just *doxa*. Sure, neither Aristotle, nor Hegel, nor for that matter Popper, would have objected to this statement. In fact they did not object. Why the fuss then?

“The history of mankind” cannot be written, says Popper. Let us consider the verb ‘can.’ If one underwrote the concept of *totality* in the way that Aristotle or Leibniz did in presenting individual substances (and as I tried to elucidate, this is exactly how, at the outset of his analysis, Popper defined holism), then we may take the verb ‘can’ seriously. “The history of mankind” in the above sense cannot be written, for that is impossible. Yet neither Hegel nor Marx ever wanted to write the history of mankind; they did not want to write a history at all. The philosophy of history relates to history writing as aesthetics does to painting or to poetry. Moreover, the philosophy of history is highly selective; it has no ambition to include all determinations into its story, but only those few that are singled out as decisive for making sense of the whole. Whether they admit it or not, they distinguish between the stories and facts they consider merely empirical, and thus without significance, on the one hand, and those they consider transcendental and thus essential, on the other. This kind of philosophy of the history (which is itself not a history) of humankind can be written and it has been written. Indeed, just this is what we call a grand narrative.

Yet Popper also adds something more to his criticism. He writes: “Yet holists not only plan to study the whole society by an impossible method, they also plan to control and reconstruct our society ‘as a whole’ [. . .] It is a totalitarian intuition.”⁶ I will disregard the concrete cutting edge of these remarks, particularly those concerning control, for it suffices to speak of the totalistic reconstruction alone. A kind of totalistic reconstruction, indeed, characterises roughly all grand narratives. Behind all grand narratives lurks a generalised sentence, for example, ‘In all societies . . .’ For us, today, the problem with

grand narratives is not their shortcoming in selecting a few factors and neglecting others, which they knew in advance would yield 'The True (the only true) Story'. All the other factors, if considered, would only obscure the story, make it simply false, untrue. The sentence 'the whole is the truth' is not necessarily metaphysical or a master statement of a grand narrative. Rather, it becomes such if one presupposes that the story which one is about to tell, the supposed whole story, is the sole true story to be told.

It is in this light that I would like to assess Popper's objections against essentialism, monism, against asking the 'what is?' question, and against the Aristotelian rendering of *dynamis* and *energeia*. All of these questions also concern the issue of identity. I disagree with many of Popper's recommendations and I consider several of his critical remarks blatantly unjust, beside the point, and at times, self-contradictory. For example, Popper remarks that historicists identify the historical beginning with the cause of the development and says that according to them, hidden essences develop throughout a historical development, but cannot be reconciled in the same theory. In fact both Aristotle and Hegel accepted the second and not the first proposition. In contrast, those who advocated the first proposition were not historicists. For them, the independent variable of historical development (for example, in Marx) is simply not the ultimate origination or cause of the development.

The identity of something can be approached by asking the 'what is' question. This is the wrong, unscientific question, according to Popper. Hegel, in fact, said exactly the same, by which he meant thereby that definitions are fruitless and unproductive. Yet Popper does not mean that definitions are fruitless, but that nominal definitions alone are fruitful (his example: 'what kind of animal do we call a puppy?' instead of 'what is a puppy?'). The issue at stake is the question concerning intrinsic properties. For a metaphysician the question 'what is' can be answered by an abstraction that includes some identifying marks of the defined entity, for the sake of argumentation and mutual understanding or by a description and (alternatively) a story told. One can also admit that description is impossible and still ask the 'what is question' (for example, Heidegger: 'what is Being?'). One can also say that the story told is only one story told from one perspective (like Nietzsche, in telling the story of good and evil).

Yet Popper is right: for a metaphysician, the second answer to the question 'what is,' must be the full description of the features that determine that which *is* as it is. It is presupposed that the determining features are intrinsic, and the fact that they remain intrinsic is essential for maintaining the identity of the very thing that *is*, throughout all of the changes it undergoes. By the way, the well-known statement also criticised by Popper, that the whole is always something more than the sum total of its parts, belongs to the same tradition. Thus for Hegel, for example, the essence of philosophy is the history of philosophy; it appears in the history which develops all of the intrinsic features (essences) of philosophy. In the End one arrives at *the* Philosophy, that is, at Absolute Knowledge, or the Whole, which consists of all the intrinsic determinations, and which is obviously more than the sum total of all its determinations. And for Hegel, this is also the answer to the question: 'What is philosophy?'

Metaphysical systems and stories, while defining and describing the intrinsic determinations that constitute and organise the identity of things and events, must homogenise them even when they advocate heterogeneity. The problematic character of this philosophical practice is obvious even in the case of the simplest questions. What is a man? What is a human being? And particularly: What makes X an X and not a Y? Is it the memory? The life story? The body? The recognition by the other? The face? The name? And I could go on. But to describe the identity of a social body, of a society, of a historical period, and so on, is still more complex. Nonetheless, grand narratives, which operate with most of the presuppositions Popper attacked, must understand our modern society as a system, as a historical result, as a whole, as an entity which is more than the sum total of its so-called parts or constituents, and (with all its heterogeneity acknowledged) finally as homogeneous. This is because in the end grand narratives must identify the essential features of the modern world, and not just some of them, but all of those features which make modern society that what it is, namely a modern society.

A grand narrative must identify the essential features which establish its identity, an identity that it preserves throughout all changes, an identity that is in itself essential, for it includes all the intrinsic features of the modern worlds. Thus when Hegel tells the whole story, when he presupposes the identity of History, his story must culminate in a description of the present, in an account

of the essence of the present, that is, in the full presentation of the essential constituents of the modern world. The problem with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is not that he described a closed society in Popper's terms; rather he described an open one in his terms. The problem is that he described the essential determination of the modern world in full, that is, he homogenised the heterogeneity of the modern world in a normative, idealised model in order to establish its identity. And when Marx identified modernity as a capitalist society resulting from the developmental laws of history, he also homogenised the modern world far more than Hegel, I must say, since he presupposed that everything else in modernity is to be understood as the superstructure of the economic base. True, Marx did not propose a closed society either, yet his description of the modern world is even more essentialist, in the Popperian sense, than that of Hegel. Popper was more lenient with Marx, perhaps because he rarely used the traditional metaphysical vocabulary, but instead introduced the positivist, yet no less metaphysical, vocabulary of the nineteenth century sciences, with its terms such as powers, forces and so on.

The gist of the matter is that modern society can neither be described, nor even reasonably approximated by the employment of metaphysical terminology and its final game, the grand narrative. I think that those traditional philosophical categories and language games (among which I mentioned a few) that were eminently criticised by Popper, were still proper theoretical tools for making pre-modern worlds understood, since pre-modern worlds were far more homogeneous than modern ones. I have already mentioned one important difference, which remained unnoticed by Popper, namely that traditional societies, the Greek *polis* and democracy included, were really threatened with destruction by an ongoing querying and questioning of traditional norms or ways of life. Modern worlds, though, thrive on such questioning, for it presupposes their health and survival. Ancient metaphysics and grand narratives have collapsed today not because they are bad philosophies, nor because they have been falsified or overcome by our most clever contemporaries, but because they themselves became irrelevant (and perhaps far worse philosophies will yet become more relevant), because they have arrived in a world—our world—which is based upon freedom where contingency plays the first fiddle.

There can be both open and closed societies in this world. Moreover, closed societies are possible only where open societies already exist. In fact, Popper said so, only that he believed that there were open societies in Plato and Aristotle's time and that the sophists were their ideologues. Funny as it may sound, one could also understand Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* as a kind of grand narrative, since it tells the story of a more than two thousand year-old struggle between the defenders of open and closed societies. This struggle, we might say, replaces the class struggle in Popper. Yet I would recommend leaving this struggle behind—together with all the eternal struggles to illuminate one or another corner of the present situation of the world.

IV

At this point two questions raised by Popper assume importance—those of sovereignty and of the paradox of freedom. Although Popper touches upon these decisive issues several times, I will concentrate, for simplicity's sake, on his discussion in Chapter 7 of *The Open Society*. Popper says that by expressing the problem of politics in the form 'Who should rule?' or 'Whose will should be supreme?' Plato created a lasting confusion in political philosophy. He continues to the effect that contemporary answers to the question, such as 'the master race,' 'the industrial workers,' or 'the people' simply follow from the wrong kind of question. At this point he comes to the conclusion that one has to replace the question of 'who should rule?' with another one, namely "*How can we so organise political institutions that bad and incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?*"⁷ A few pages later Popper discusses the paradox of freedom, and comes to the conclusion that the source of the paradox is nothing else but the question of sovereignty, in this case popular sovereignty. Modern democracy operates through majority decision, but the majority can be tyrannical. In freedom, that is, freely, we choose to establish tyranny. If one replaces Plato's old question concerning sovereignty with the new question I quoted above, the paradox of freedom will also evaporate.⁸

I think that Popper was right when he traced the question of sovereignty back to Plato, to the question 'Who should rule?'—even if the medieval concept of sovereignty complicated the issue. The question of who should rule

is straightforward and does not hide the obvious: the identity of power and sovereignty. The sovereign does as he will, no matter who he is and no one can raise objections, because ruling means the exercise of power. As György Márkus has pointed it out, it would have made no sense in the ancient world to speak of freedom unless it also meant exercising power against someone else.⁹ The sovereign was not meant to be the source of all powers, but was power embodied—and whether it was in one person, in a few, or in many, did not make a difference in principle, only in preference. In the spirit of the idea of the medieval God-anointed king, however, the sovereign (the king) had to be authorised in principle by the Supreme Ruler, God himself. As a result, in this tradition sovereignty needed authorisation, and it was presupposed that one person, and one person alone, should receive the final authorisation. According to this conception, a sovereign is one person (or one body taken as one person) who has the authority to make final decisions. Needless to say, such a concept of sovereignty is linked to representation. Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, and in the twentieth century, Carl Schmitt, essentially followed the medieval model. This is also true about modern representative democracies. Thus, if in a democracy one speaks of popular sovereignty, one does not mean the direct exercise of power by the ‘people’; rather ‘the people’ are the source of all powers and thus can empower a body or several bodies to exercise its will and can also revoke this assignment. The problem with the concept of popular sovereignty is not that it condones the tyrannical rule of the majority (as was the case in the Greek model described by Plato) but its inconsistency and flaws. The people can exercise its sovereignty—its will—only in institutions and through institutions which themselves were not established through its will. At the time of the birth of European democracies, so-called ‘Constituent Assemblies’ made the constitution and then dissolved it to give place to the bodies that were already supposed to be the representatives of the People’s power. Thus People are substituted for the king, without having been authorised by God. This is, however, a weak and shaky solution, which does not stand solidly on its feet, even theoretically, although, as we can say with Popper, that such a ‘solution’ can work pragmatically through trial and error.

Popper’s rejection of the concept of sovereignty, though, is reasonable in two ways, because he notices, firstly, that it is theoretically inconsistent and believes that it is also dangerous, and secondly, because he also believes—just as

Richard Rorty does now—that liberal democracy has no need of philosophical justification. It simply works and thus maintains itself without such philosophical justification. One may add that Popper is far from being alone in his distrust of the sovereignty tradition. Hannah Arendt, who belongs to an entirely different philosophical and political school, also shared this view. She even adds that American democracy never supported or employed the concept of sovereignty and had no use for it, because among others reasons, it developed a direct democracy and not merely a representative one. This is a very controversial point, which I do not want to discuss. I want to return to Popper instead.

We have seen that Popper believes that if one leaves behind the concept of sovereignty one also leaves behind the paradox of freedom. I would like to ask two questions. First, I ask whether it is possible to abandon the concept of sovereignty entirely, at least on a theoretical plane and not just pragmatically. Second, I ask if one leaves behind the concept of sovereignty, has one also overcome the paradox of freedom? Or is rather the opposite the case, namely that after the abandoning the sovereignty principle the paradox of freedom will reappear and show itself in full?

I quoted above Popper's thought that the sovereignty question should be replaced by another one: "How can we so organise political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?" Although this question was raised by Plato in his *Laws*, its origin is now beside the point. The issue is that Popper's question does not explain who this 'we' is, or, are, and it also remains unclear what it means to cause 'damage' and namely to whom. Obviously it is to 'us,' but the sovereignty question is exactly about the identity of this 'us.' Popper's sentence circumvents the question. In the famous 'we the People,' the People stand for the Sovereign. Are the People exercising their power directly, without restraint? This would be a repetition of the old story about the unrestricted tyranny of the majority. Or does a higher power authorise the people just as God authorised the royal sovereigns once upon a time, and by authorising them, obliging them to follow His commandments? In the great example of the American *Declaration of Independence* there is such an authorisation. The founding fathers formulated this authority thus: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident', and then they enumerated the fundamental natural rights. One is a member of 'the

People' if one is a signatory of the belief in those fundamental laws of nature. I agree with Popper that the so-called natural law is a fiction. However, as Popper could add, God is also a fiction, yet he could still warrant authority to kings. Why can't laws of nature, albeit fictions, authorise the People and offer a quasi-ontological justification for popular sovereignty? Because God as the authority behind royal sovereignty was not a fiction, they did not need a signature for its acceptance; whereas the laws of nature today are perceived as fictions, one has to choose them, choose their truth in the form of the commitment: 'We will act as though all men were born free and were endowed equally with reason and conscience', and so on. This is what can be called the weak, or the minimum, ethos of modern democratic political life.

But this is not an answer to the paradox of freedom.

The modern world is founded on freedom, which means that it is, and remains, unfounded. Freedom is the foundation that does not found. This is the fundamental paradox of freedom and it cannot be solved, for no paradox can be solved or eliminated. One has to live with them.¹⁰

Popper was perhaps the first to discover that Reason in the modern world became paradoxical. That is: he discovered that one cannot offer sufficient rational grounds for the acceptance of rationality, in other words, that there are as good arguments for its acceptance as for its rejection. One chooses reason in an act of faith. Yet the paradox of reason is, at least in my view, just one manifestation of the paradox of freedom. What Popper admitted in the case of reason is also valid in the case of freedom, with the case of political liberty included. One can bring in as many and as good arguments for freedom and liberty as against them. In this case Rorty and Popper are right, for in a functioning liberal democracy, the arguments for freedom and liberty are more attractive, and certain liberties at least are taken for granted. Yet even in democracies, liberties can be threatened, not to speak of tyrannies and totalitarian states, which also keep re-appearing in the modern world. Popper was right in holding that in closed societies holism takes the shape of a closed belief system. And a closed belief system cannot be attacked by arguments alone; these arguments need to be backed by alternative beliefs, or in our case, by a faith in liberties. No one single item in the catalogue of the fictions termed 'natural rights' and enumerated in the *Declaration of*

Independence is taken to be self-evident nowadays in the greater part of the world. And in all probability they will not be so understood, at least not in the immediately foreseeable future. One can be as sincere as Popper was in his defence of reason and admit that in a world founded on freedom, that is, in an unfounded world, one must choose liberties and sign up for them with the gesture of faith.

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Notes

- ¹ This essay is based on a paper given at the conference on the work of Karl Popper held in Fall, 2002.
- ² Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume II, Hegel and Marx*, London, Routledge, p. 270.
- ³ Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, New York, Harper and Row, 1961, p. 76.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ⁷ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume 1, Plato*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 121, italics original.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.
- ⁹ György Márkus, unpublished manuscript.
- ¹⁰ This is discussed in my *A Theory of Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999.